

# A HISTORY OF MARINE ATTACK SQUADRON 223



HISTORY AND MUSEUMS DIVISION  
HEADQUARTERS, U.S. MARINE CORPS  
WASHINGTON, D.C.

*On the front cover:*

*The Brewster F2A-1 was the first aircraft assigned to VMF-223 when it was commissioned on 1 May 1942 at the Marine Corps Air Station Ewa, Oahu, Hawaii. (USMC Photo 25414).*

# A HISTORY OF MARINE ATTACK SQUADRON 223

By

First Lieutenant Brett A. Jones, USMC



HISTORY AND MUSEUMS DIVISION  
HEADQUARTERS, U.S. MARINE CORPS  
WASHINGTON, D.C.

1978

PCN 19000413900

---

For sale by the Superintendent of Documents, U.S. Government Printing Office  
Washington, D.C. 20402  
Stock Number 008-065-00132-3

# FOREWORD

---

This history is one of a series being prepared by the Marine Corps History and Museums Division to bring to light the achievements of individual squadrons while at the same time showing the growth and development of Marine aviation. Marine Attack Squadron 223 has a long and illustrious career of outstanding accomplishments and has produced some of the finest aviators in the history of the Marine Corps. This work sketches the achievements and personalities that have made VMA-223 such an outstanding Marine squadron.

The author, First Lieutenant (now Captain) Brett A. Jones, was a member of VMA-223 from February 1974 to July 1975 and worked closely with the History and Museums staff to produce this monograph. First Lieutenant Jones graduated from Oklahoma State University in December 1971 with a Bachelor of Science degree in sociology. Upon graduation he was commissioned in the Marine Corps and sent to Pensacola for flight training. After a brief tour in Yuma he joined VMA-223.

The History and Museums Division welcomes any comments on the narrative and particularly requests additional information or illustrations which might enhance a future edition.



E. H. SIMMONS  
Brigadier General, U.S. Marine Corps (Ret)  
Director of Marine Corps History and Museums

Reviewed and Approved:  
15 June 1978



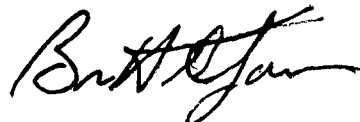
# PREFACE

---

This history was compiled for the purpose of providing a concise and accurate record of a distinguished squadron's accomplishments. It is the author's belief that a thorough knowledge of the past contributes immeasurably to the development of strong unit integrity. Just as "Espirit de Corps" is instilled in a Marine by a thorough knowledge of Marine Corps history, unit pride can be instilled by the awareness of unit's accomplishments.

The history of Marine Attack Squadron 223 has been one of constant endeavor. The original "Bulldogs" at Guadalcanal initiated a tradition that has continued for over 30 years. It is sincerely hoped that this work will assist in the continuation of that tradition.

The History and Museums Division provided the research materials for the monograph and the editing was done by several of the History and Museums staff members. Mr. James S. Santelli and Major William J. Sambito initially edited the manuscript, and Lieutenant Colonel Gary W. Parker completed the monograph for publication.



BRETT A. JONES  
First Lieutenant, U.S. Marine Corps





# TABLE OF CONTENTS

---

Foreword .....	iii
Preface .....	v
Table of Contents .....	vii
From Birth to Guadalcanal .....	1
From the Solomons to Okinawa .....	5
A Force in Readiness: 1946-1950 .....	11
Entering the Jet Age .....	14
Vietnam .....	20
The Return to Garrison .....	27
Footnotes .....	31
Appendix A: Chronology .....	33
Appendix B: Commanding Officers .....	35
Appendix C: Streamer Entitlement .....	37



# A History of Marine Attack Squadron 223

*From Birth to Guadalcanal—From the Solomons to Okinawa—A Force in Readiness: 1946-1950—  
Entering the Jet Age—Vietnam—The Return to Garrison*

---

## *From Birth to Guadalcanal*

The devastating attack on Pearl Harbor by the Japanese in December 1941 had decimated the aircraft of the 1st Marine Aircraft Wing (MAW) leaving only 15 planes which were considered combat worthy. Marine Fighting Squadron (VMF) 223 was commissioned at the Marine Corps Air Station (MCAS) Ewa, Oahu, Hawaii on 1 May 1942 in an effort to help restore the combat potential of the 1st MAW.

The squadron's immediate function was to conduct local operations on the Hawaiian Sea Frontier as part of the newly formed Marine Aircraft Group (MAG) 23. Under the leadership of Captain John L. Smith, the first commanding officer of the "Rainbow" squadron, later to become known as the "Bulldogs," the unit began training operations in the Brewster F2A fighter. Captain Smith, a 28-year-old native of Lexington, Oklahoma, was to distinguish himself as an aviator during World War II, and his leadership was to bring VMF-223 into the spotlight in the air over Guadalcanal.

When World War II began the Marine Corps land-based squadrons in the Pacific were flying the F2A, built by Brewster in the late 1930s. The Brewster was powered by a Wright R-1820-24 engine which could produce 1,200 horsepower at 2,500 revolutions per minute (rpm); the plane could attain an airspeed of 323 miles per hour and had a service ceiling of 34,000 feet. It was armed with four wing-mounted .50 caliber machineguns and could carry two 100-pound bombs. As was demonstrated in the Battle of Midway, 4-6 June 1942, the aircraft was unable to cope with Japanese fighters and was appropriately dubbed the Brewster "Buffalo." It soon was replaced by superior aircraft.<sup>1</sup>

As early as June 1942, Admiral Chester M. Nimitz, Commander in Chief, Pacific Fleet, had

designated all four squadrons of MAG-23 for the defense of a beachhead on Guadalcanal. According to the plan, the forward echelon of MAG-23, consisting of VMF 223 and Marine Scout Bombing Squadron (VMSB) 232 and commanded by Major Richard C. Mangrum, would be flown to the airstrip on Guadalcanal from a carrier. Both squadrons lacked carrier experience; nearly all the pilots were fresh from flight school where they had logged about 275 hours apiece in SNJ trainers. The veteran Japanese naval pilots they would face averaged approximately 800 hours of flight time prior to the bombing of Pearl Harbor. The VMF-223 aviators, except for Captains Smith, Rivers J. Morrell, Jr., and Marion E. Carl\*, and one veteran enlisted pilot, Technical Sergeant John D. Lindley, were second lieutenants ranging in age from 19 to 21 and had been in the Marine Corps for only a few months.

The squadrons sailed for Guadalcanal on board the escort carrier USS *Long Island* (CVE 1) on 2 August 1942. Prior to departure, the Buffalo was replaced with the new Grumman F4F-4 Wildcat. This plane became the standard fighter for Marine pilots during the early actions of World War II. This single-seat, carrier fighter was powered by a Pratt and Whitney R-1830-56 engine which produced 1,200 horsepower at 2,500 rpm and had a maximum airspeed of 332 miles per hour with a service ceiling of 34,300 feet. The aircraft was equipped with racks for two 250-pound bombs, one under each wing, or the bombs could be replaced with external fuel tanks. Six .50 caliber machineguns, three in each wing, and six five-inch rockets completed the Wildcat's armament.<sup>2</sup>

---

\*Rivers J. Morrell, Jr., retired from the Marine Corps in July 1959 as a brigadier general. Marion E. Carl rose to the rank of major general and retired in June of 1973.



USMC Photo 35714

*The Grumman F4F Wildcat fighter had a 1200-horsepower Pratt & Whitney engine. This land/carrier-based aircraft was the standard naval fighter during the early Pacific war.*

The *Long Island* and its escorts stopped at the island of Efate, New Hebrides, where Captain Smith traded eight of his inexperienced pilots for better qualified pilots from Major Harold W. Bauer's VMF-212.\* On the afternoon of 20 August, the *Long Island*, accompanied by the cruiser USS *Helena* (CL 50) and destroyer USS *Dale* (DD 353), launched the Marine planes about 200 miles southeast of Guadalcanal. At 1700, MAG-23 began landing at Henderson Field, named in honor of Major Lofton R. Henderson, a Marine aviator who was killed earlier in the war while leading Marine dive bombers in the Battle of Midway. "A shout of relief and welcome went up from every Marine on the island," reported Lieutenant Herbert L. Merillat.<sup>3</sup> The arrival of MAG-23 and the Rainbow squadron coincided with the first bloody battle that Major General Alexander A. Vandegrift's 1st Marine Division fought on Guadalcanal.

Just after midnight on 21 August 1942 firing broke out about 3,000 yards east of Henderson Field and the Battle of the Tenaru River had started. The Japanese were reinforcing their command on Guadalcanal with 900 troops of the Ichiki Detachment\*\* via the "Tokyo Express".\*\*\* The Ichiki Detachment attacked the Marines early in the morning and was slaughtered. Japanese intelligence

had grossly underestimated the U.S. strength at 800-1000 troops instead of a division. At daybreak the pilots of VMF-223 unleashed the fury of their Wildcats on the enemy, catching many of the Japanese on the beach. The strafing runs were the first shots fired in anger by the VMF-223 pilots.

At noon, about 19 hours after their arrival at Guadalcanal, the VMF-223 pilots had their first taste of aerial combat. Captain Smith was the first to down an enemy Zero, but his victory was lessened by the loss of an F4F which crash-landed on Henderson Field after being severely shot up. The score remained one to one for the day.

Prior to VMF-223's arrival at Guadalcanal, Rear Admiral Raizo Tanaka, the Tokyo Expressman, had gathered a force at Rabaul, New Britain, which he mistakenly considered formidable enough to dislodge the Marines from the island. The enemy had a special naval landing force of 800 men and an Army detachment of 700 men. This time the Japanese would support the landing with three carriers and three destroyers. American intelligence reported this movement, and the carriers USS *Enterprise* (CV 6), *Saratoga* (CV 3), and *Wasp* (CV 7) waited for the enemy force about 100 miles southeast of Guadalcanal. On 24 August, the Cactus Air Force\*\*\*\* met the enemy aircraft from the carrier *Ryujo* and the Battle of the Eastern Solomons was underway. At 1420 the two MAG-23 squadrons augmented by five Army P-40s,\*\*\*\*\* which had arrived from New

\*Bauer later received the Medal of Honor for action against the enemy over Guadalcanal.

\*\*These troops were from the detachment of Colonel Kiyone Ichiki which was originally scheduled to take Midway.

\*\*\*The Japanese destroyers and transports which transported troops from New Britain and the Northern Solomons to Guadalcanal became known as the "Tokyo Express."

\*\*\*\*Cactus was Guadalcanal's code name.

\*\*\*\*\*The P-40 was the early version of the Bell P-39 fighter equipped with a 20mm cannon, two .50 caliber and four .30 caliber machineguns.



USMC Photo 52801

*Wildcats on the fighter strip at Guadalcanal. Note runway and living conditions (above). Marine aircrews use dirt and chemicals to save a burning Wildcat set afire by a Japanese air raid on Guadalcanal (left).*



USMC Photo 50516

Caledonia; intercepted an enemy flight of 15 bombers and 12 fighters. These Japanese aircraft never reached Henderson Field. The Marines shot down 10 bombers and half of the fighters. Captain Carl alone was credited with two bombers and a fighter. The victory was not without its cost; three of Captain Smith's pilots, Second Lieutenants Elwood R. Bailey, Lawrence C. Taylor, and Roy A. Corry, failed to return, and one pilot was shot down and later recovered.

From the beginning of the war and especially after Bataan and early New Guinea fighting, many American aviators regarded the Zero and its pilots as opponents of malevolent perfection. During the Battles of the Coral Sea and Midway, the enemy gained more prowess and the U.S. fighter pilots were acquiring a distinct inferiority complex. On 24 August the Rainbow squadron and the other units at Guadalcanal destroyed the theory that the Zero was invincible.

On the 26th, as VMF-223 enjoyed continued success against enemy air raids, Captain Carl shot down two more planes becoming the second Marine

Corps ace.\* Aerial combat on the 29th resulted in four enemy fighters and four enemy bombers destroyed, and the following day another 14 enemy aircraft were sent flaming to earth. The score continued to favor the Rainbow pilots as the air action over Guadalcanal increased.

Marines learned very early in the war not to dogfight with the more maneuverable Zero. Instead, the enemy's bombers became the primary targets. As the bombers approached, usually 26 at a time in a series of "V" formations, it was possible for the Wildcats to dive on the bombers and destroy a few before the Zeros jumped the Grummans. The tactics which evolved and remained, while the Marines were flying the F4F, were primarily hit-and-run; a direct overhead or a high-side attack on the bombers (avoiding their tail guns), one quick burst at an attacking Zero, and then run. If a pilot unintentionally became entangled in a dogfight with the faster, better climbing Zero, it was necessary to rely on his wingman to shoot the enemy off his tail, which is where the Zero could usually be found. This two-plane mutually protecting tactic evened the odds.

Conditions at Guadalcanal were miserable and were continually growing worse. The field was either

---

\*Colonel Gregory "Pappy" Boyington, a lieutenant in 1941, resigned his commission to fly with the famed "Flying Tigers" of China. During his months with the "Tigers," Boyington shot down six Japanese planes. Upon his return to the Marine Corps in September 1942, he was awarded the distinction of being the Corps' first ace.

a bowl of black dust or a quagmire of mud. Refueling had to be done by hand from 55-gallon drums and radio communications from Henderson Field did not exist beyond 20 miles. The diet for the Marines consisted of dehydrated potatoes, Spam, or cold hash, and sometimes Japanese rice. Malaria and dysentery became constant companions. Sleep in mud-floored tents was constantly interrupted by bombardments from Japanese ships and planes. Enemy cruisers, destroyers, and submarines often lay offshore lobbing shells at Henderson Field.

VMF-223 joined other elements of MAG-23 on 2 September 1942 in intercepting a 40-plane enemy raid. During the ensuing battle, the squadron downed another seven enemy aircraft. On the 12th, the island was hit with a bombardment from seven Japanese destroyers while 42 enemy planes attempted to obtain air superiority. The Cactus Air Force shot down 15 of the attacking planes, but the airfield received several hits. Meanwhile, enemy troops attacked just south of Henderson Field. The following day, while ground units were fighting the Battle of Bloody Ridge, the field was attacked three more times by aircraft. The airfield, although severely damaged, remained firmly in Marine hands.

During the months of August and September 1942, Guadalcanal was continually augmented by aircraft and pilots from various commands. The carriers USS *Hornet* (CV 12) and the *Wasp*, after receiving battle damage, sent some of their F4Fs ashore until the flattops could be repaired. The growing Cactus Air Force intercepted 31 Japanese planes over Henderson Field on 27 September and 11 enemy aircraft were destroyed. The next day the Emperor's "Eagles" from Rabaul in New Britain arrived with a flight of 55 planes determined to neutralize Marine aviation on Guadalcanal. Once again the determined American pilots met the enemy, this time sending 24 of the attacking planes to a watery grave. Of those destroyed, VMF-223 was credited with seven. The Japanese, determined to make the island a major battleground, sought air supremacy and control of the sea, but once again the enemy had underestimated the air force necessary to achieve their goal.

Captain Marion E. Carl was shot down early in September 1942 and was listed as missing in action for five days. His journey back to Cactus was an adventure many pilots had to face during the war in Pacific. Captain Carl gave the following account of that incident:

Bullets began flying all over the place. The cockpit filled up with smoke blinding me. I never did get a look at what was on my tail before I bailed out.

The parachute opened at 10,000 feet and I floated down off Near Island a few miles off the coast of Guadalcanal, about 30 miles from home. I was dunked into the ocean 400 yards off the island and started to swim to shore. I got within hailing distance of the beach, but the current prevented me from landing.

I was just about to give up when a native boy paddled out in a canoe, grabbed me, and hauled me aboard more dead than alive.

After being taken ashore, the native gave Captain Carl a drink of coconut milk and then brought the aviator from the island to a native village on Guadalcanal where he was fed and housed for the night.

The natives agreed to take me to headquarters the next morning. Before we got out of the village, a Japanese party began heading for it. I went into the jungle and hid. Early the next morning we started home. Two native police and a large group of native villagers accompanied me. On the way I found a deserted radio shack and spent four hours trying to get it going.

We went a short way further on when we encountered large groups of natives fleeing in our direction. They told us there were 2,000 Japanese between us and the U.S. headquarters and that it was impossible to get through them.

Captain Carl was then taken to the hut of an educated native who had studied medicine. The man had a small launch and agreed to take the young pilot up the coast to headquarters.

We planned to leave at three-thirty that day, but the engine wouldn't start. I was a former aeronautical engineer so I spent all the rest of the day taking it apart and finally got it running. We left at dawn and had no trouble arriving.

Captain Carl's first question when he arrived was "What's Smitty's score?" He grimaced when he was told that Major John L. Smith, his closest competitor, had shot down a total of 16 planes and pulled ahead of Captain Carl during the five days that he was missing. "Ground him for five days, General," Captain Carl said to Brigadier General Roy S. Geiger, commander of the 1st MAW. "That will give me a chance to catch up."<sup>4</sup>

Keeping records was one of the last priorities during the autumn of 1942. Even the original name of the island, "Guaduncanar," was changed, probably due to a misprint or mispronunciation that stuck.<sup>5</sup> It was not possible to say who was flying from Guadalcanal at any given time. An example of this occurred on 3 October 1942, when a Japanese air attack was met by 29 fighters; 15 were from the Navy's Fighter Squadron (VF) 5, five from VMF-

223, and nine from VMF-224 (including two pilots on temporary duty from VMF-212). With the units becoming so entangled, almost anybody could be your wingman.

The action in the skies over Guadalcanal during September and early October cost the lives of five VMF-223 second lieutenants: Zennith A. Pond, Noyles McLennan, Richard A. Haring, Willis S. Lees III, and Charles Kendrick.<sup>6</sup> After the first week of October, the Japanese air raids ceased. The uneasy calm lasted until 1220 on the 11th when radar at Henderson Field reported two flights of unidentified aircraft at 138 miles heading toward Guadalcanal. The aircraft at Guadalcanal were scrambled, including 16 planes from VMF-223, and they intercepted the invading force of 34 bombers and 29 Zeros. Seven bombers and four Zeros were destroyed and the remaining enemy aircraft had to turn back when they were unable to locate Henderson Field because of a low overcast which blanketed the island.

This enemy armada, which had the mission of destroying the airfield, was only the air portion of a large invading force. Two cruisers and six destroyers were steaming toward Guadalcanal carrying a landing force complete with heavy artillery and tanks. U.S. intelligence had located this task force and "search and destroy" ships were en route to intercept the enemy convoy. The American warships surprised the Japanese at Cape Esperance and dealt them a devastating and costly defeat.

After less than two months of combat, MAG-23 packed its equipment, readied its aircraft, and departed Guadalcanal on 13 October 1942 bound for California. The Rainbow squadron had, during its short time at Henderson Field, written a new chapter in Marine Corps aviation. VMF-223 had been the first Marine fighter squadron to arrive in the Solomons. Major John L. Smith had led his pilots on multiple combat missions during which the squadron accounted for 83 Japanese aircraft destroyed. For his action during this period, Major Smith was awarded the Medal of Honor. Also during the struggle for Guadalcanal, Captain Carl earned his second Navy Cross for extraordinary heroism in aerial combat. Captain Carl's first award of the Navy Cross came during the Battle of Midway. These two men, Smith and Carl, contributed greatly to the success of Marine aviation in Guadalcanal by downing a total of 37 1/2 enemy aircraft, 19 and 18 1/2 respectively. The final tally of enemy aircraft destroyed by the Cactus Air Force between 20 August and 12 October



USMC Photo 11984  
*Major John L. Smith, USMC, who was credited with downing 19 Japanese aircraft and subsequently received the Medal of Honor.*

was an impressive 111 1/2. In recognition of this achievement, those units supporting the 1st Marine Division on Guadalcanal and neighboring Tulagi received the Presidential Unit Citation.

#### *From the Solomons to Okinawa*

Marine Fighting Squadron 223 arrived at San Diego on 17 October 1942 and remained in MAG-23, which was also arriving from Guadalcanal. VMF-223's personnel were given leave from 16 November to 4 January 1943, then the squadron began reorganizing and training. On 26 January Major Carl became the new commanding officer of VMF-223.

On 27 May 1943, for reasons unknown, the Rainbow squadron changed its nickname and became the VMF-223 "Bulldogs." The change in nickname was followed the next month by a change in squadron aircraft.

During June, VMF-223 received 18 Vought-Sikorsky F4U-1 Corsairs to augment its inventory of F4F Wildcats and North American SNJ trainers. The F4U was a single seat, low-wing monoplane powered by a single Pratt and Whitney 2,000-horsepower engine. Capable of climbing to over 35,000 feet, the Corsair was the first American

fighter to reach speeds in excess of 400 miles per hour.<sup>7</sup> The “U-birds,” as they were called, became the standard fighter for Marines during the remainder of World War II. Because of the sound and effectiveness of the diving Corsair, the Japanese name for this plane meant “Whistling Death.”

On 22 June, First Lieutenant Alexander H. Edwards was engaged in mock aerial combat with Major Carl and made a tight left turn which stalled his F4U causing his plane to go into an inverted spin. Lieutenant Edwards noticed that he was in a spin at 5,500 feet and bailed out at 3,300 feet when he was unable to get his Corsair under control. After he had bailed out, the plane came out of the spin and crashed about eight miles east of El Toro. Except for a bruised nose and a bruised ego, the young pilot escaped uninjured.

On 18 July 1943, the squadron terminated flight operations at the Marine Corps Air Station (MCAS), El Toro and completed final preparations for redeployment to the Pacific. During the previous six months of training, the squadron had operated with



USMC Photo A707812

*Left to right: Major John L. Smith, Lieutenant Colonel Richard C. Mangrum, and Captain Marion E. Carl, three giants of Marine aviation.*



USMC Photo A140897

*Major General Marion E. Carl led VMF-223 in World War II against the Japanese and is credited with downing 18 1/2 enemy airplanes.*

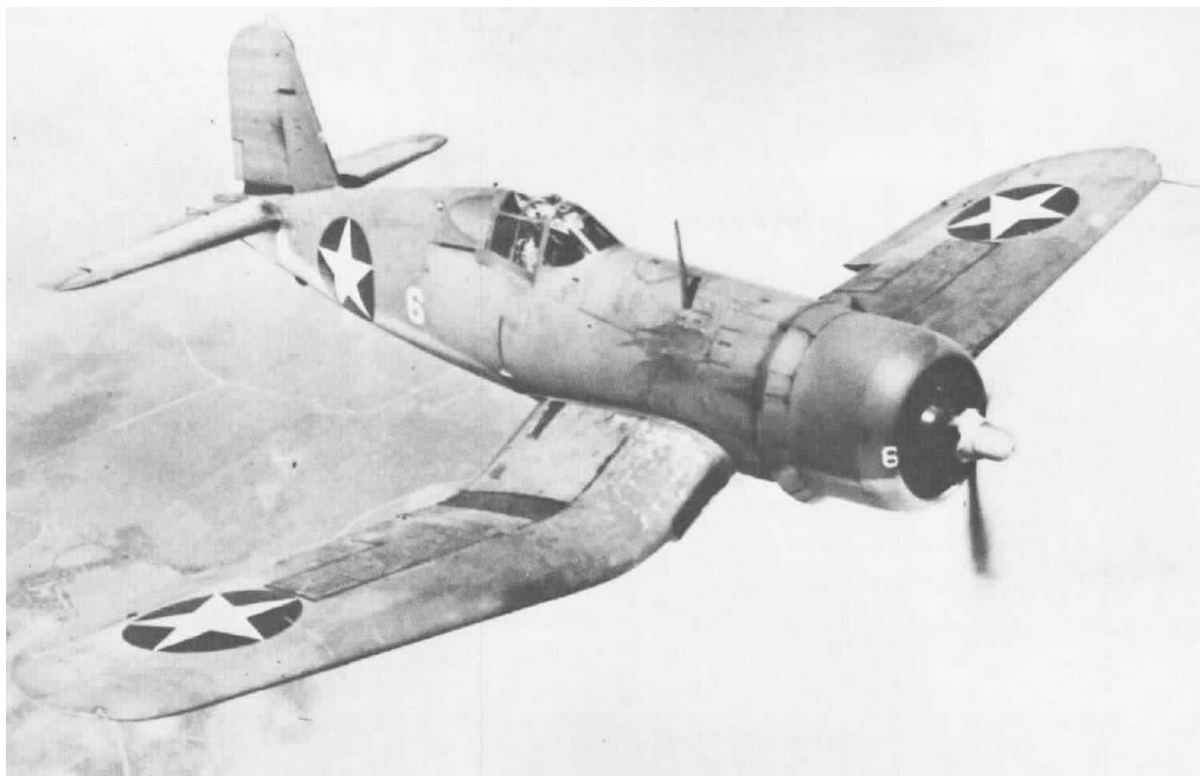
about 50 aircraft, mostly F4Us and SNJs. Aside from a few minor ground accidents, only one aircraft loss occurred during this period.

On 19 July, the Bulldogs traveled by train to the Naval Air Station (NAS), Alameda, California, and boarded the seaplane tender USS *Wright* (AV 1) on the evening of 20 July. Seven days later, the squadron arrived at MCAS, Ewa, headquarters of the 4th Marine Base Defense Aircraft Wing (4th MBDAW). During operations from Ewa, Second Lieutenant Phillip R. Aikins was killed when his F4U crashed into a mountain peak about eight miles northeast of the air station.

The training and combat air patrols over Hawaii came to an end on 1 August 1943, and the squadron was underway to Midway Island. The squadron's aircraft with some enlisted men and pilots made the trip by ship while 36 officers and men packed the remainder of the squadron's equipment in transport aircraft for the flight to Midway. On 5 August, the entire unit was on Midway as a part of MAG-22 where it was immediately divided into two sections. One section, under Major Carl, operated from Sand Island while the executive officer, Major Robert P. Keller, took charge of the second section operating from Eastern Island.

The Bulldogs completed their training on Midway on 18 October 1943. During its short stay, the unit





USMC Photo 306513

*The Chance Vought-Sikorsky F4U-1 which became the standard fighter for Marines during World War II and continued in use during the Korean War.*

had lost four F4Us and one pilot. Three of the accidents were the result of engine failures encountered while over water. Between 18 and 21 October, the entire squadron was airlifted back to Oahu where it was reassigned to MAG-23. Immediately, the squadron began assembling its equipment for another transfer. On 30 October, the entire unit sailed from Hawaii on board the escort carrier USS *Breton* (CVE 23). On the 10th day at sea, 14 Corsairs were catapulted from the *Breton* with Espiritu Santo, New Hebrides as the destination. On 11 November, the aircraft took off for the Marine Corps Air Base, Quoin Hill, Efate, New Hebrides. Meanwhile, the remainder of the squadron had shifted from the *Breton* to the auxiliary transport USS *Tyton* (APH 1) and was en route to Quoin Hill. On 18 November, VMF-223 joined MAG-12, 2d MAW at Quoin Hill. After routine training was completed on 28 November, the squadron was airlifted to Barokoma Field, Vella Lavella Island. VMF-223 was in combat once again.

The first major aerial contact with the enemy occurred on 23 December 1943. A 48-plane fighter sweep over Rabaul located about 15 enemy fighters off the coast of New Ireland. The Bulldogs scored four kills and three probables. Throughout the remainder of the month, Japanese opposition con-

tinued in the skies over Rabaul, but by 4 January 1944, enemy resistance had dwindled considerably and VMF-223 secured flight operations. The final score for this campaign was 14 Japanese fighters destroyed, 10 probables, and four damaged. Only one VMF-223 pilot, First Lieutenant Bernard E. Sahl, became a casualty when he failed to return from a flight on Christmas Day 1943.

On 4 January 1944, the squadron began preparations for a move to Bougainville in the Northern Solomons. The ground echelon embarked on board the minesweeper USS *Chandler* (DMS 9) and sailed on 19 January arriving at Torokina, Bougainville on the 25th. The aircraft remained at Barokoma Field while the flight personnel flew to Sidney, Australia, for a short rest period.

The ground echelon prepared for the arrival of the squadron aircraft and helped to service the VMF-215 Corsairs at Piva "Y" Airfield on Bougainville. On 20 January, the squadron was reassigned from MAG-12, 2d MAW to MAG-24, 1st MAW. The flight echelon returned from Australia and on 17 February rejoined the rest of the squadron at Piva "Y" strip on Bougainville. The squadron now, however, had a new commanding officer. On 4 February, Major Carl was reassigned to Headquarters Squadron, MAG-12 and Major Robert P.

Keller\* assumed command of the Bulldogs. Combat operations began immediately as the Bulldogs harassed the enemy ground units with strafing attacks destroying numerous trucks and barges on Bougainville.

On 25 February 1944, Major Harlan E. Stewart was killed during a strafing mission. While diving on a target, Major Stewart's aircraft was hit by anti-aircraft fire and crashed just offshore about three miles from Piva "Y" strip.

Shortly before dawn on 8 March, the enemy hit the Piva "Y" strip with a heavy artillery barrage which destroyed the ready room, two vehicles, one F4U, and damaged two other Corsairs. The shelling killed Private First Class John W. Carter and caused Major Keller to be hospitalized with a shrapnel wound in the hip.

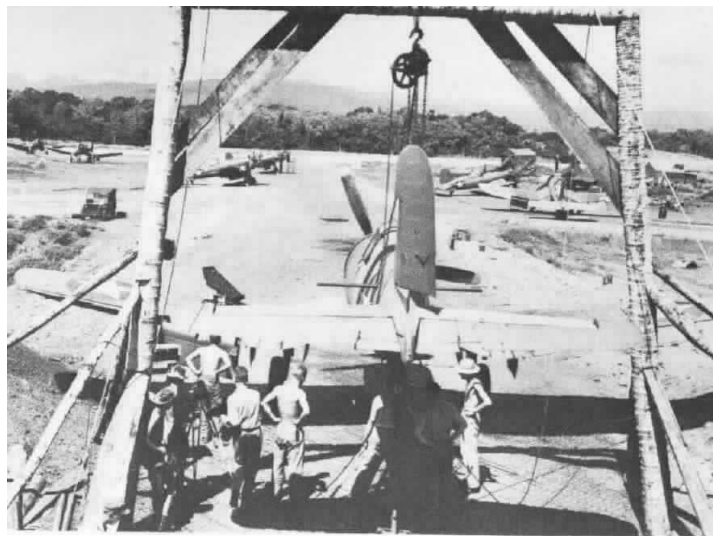
Enemy shellings became so intense that on 13 March, all 20 aircraft assigned to the squadron were flown to Green Island for dispersal. Two days later, the ground echelon embarked on board an LST and sailed for Green Island. For its action at Piva airstrip, the squadron received a letter of commendation from Major General Ralph J. Mitchell, Commander, Aircraft, Solomon Islands, for devotion to duty and tireless effort in maintaining operations from the airstrip during hostile shellings.

On 14 March 1944, the squadron was assigned to MAG-14, 1st MAW. Two weeks later, the flight personnel flew to Efate Island where those pilots with three combat tours departed for duty in the U.S., and the remaining pilots left for rest and recreation (R&R) in New Zealand and Australia. The ground personnel, meanwhile, remained on Green Island servicing the planes of VMF-114. The pilots rejoined the ground echelon on 7 May 1944, relieving VMF-114.

For the next two months, the Bulldogs operated from Green Island flying escort, air-sea rescue cover, and strafing missions. The action over Rabaul again was costly to the squadron. Five pilots, First Lieutenants Raymond P. Mumme, James W. Lizer, Charles F. Inman, and Second Lieutenants John C. Perkins, Jr., and Lawrence W. Pingree, were lost between 12 May and 16 June.<sup>8</sup> Flight operations on Green Island were secured on 18 June and the flight echelon left for Turtle Bay, Espiritu Santo Island. Eighteen pilots who had completed a third combat

---

\*Robert P. Keller rose to the rank of lieutenant general before retiring from the Marine Corps in 1974.



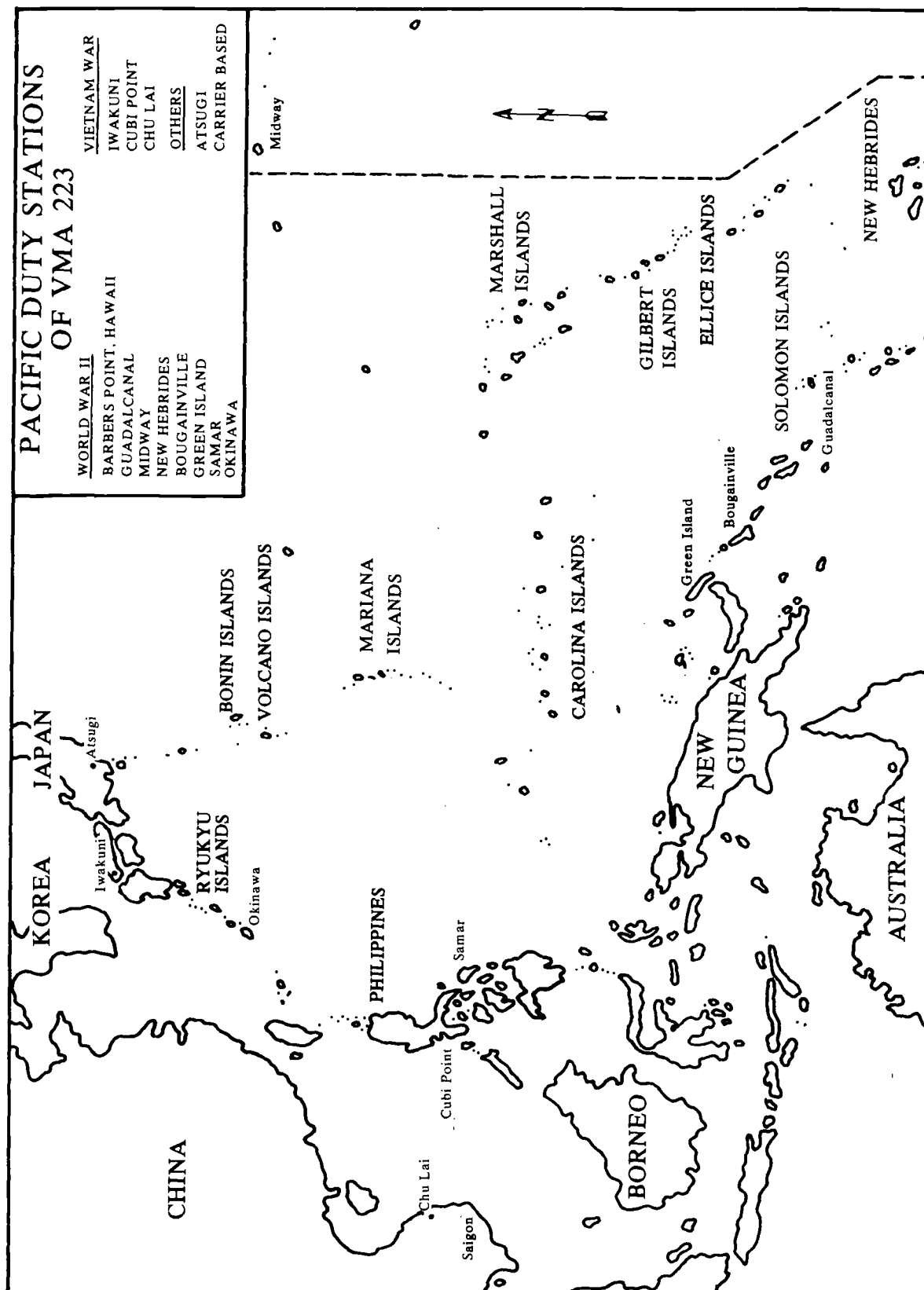
USMC Photo 55429

*Marines bore sighting an F4U on Guadalcanal using their homemade apparatus constructed of coconut logs.*

tour rotated to the U.S. while the remaining 18 pilots departed for Sidney for R&R. The ground personnel, on board the SS *President Tyler*, departed Green Island on the 24th bound for Bougainville where they serviced planes for Marine Observation Squadron (VMO) 251. The squadron was also reassigned to MAG-24, 1st MAW.

The pilots returned to Espiritu Santo on 6 July and, with a number of new pilots assigned, began training in gunnery and tactics. With 20 new F4Us, the flight echelon left Espiritu Santo and joined the remainder of the squadron on 1 August. While operating from the Piva "North" airstrip, VMF-223 began flying missions over New Ireland, Rataval, Rabaul, Duke of York Islands, and Cape Lambert on New Britain. Warehouses, huts, and personnel were bombed and strafed as the squadron continued in the campaign of attrition against the Japanese on Gazelle Peninsula, New Britain, and on Bougainville. Using every conceivable technique of ordnance delivery the Bulldogs bombed and strafed enemy bivouac areas, supply dumps, villages, and coastal installations throughout the Northern Solomons and Bismarck Islands. On 8 December 1944, combat operations were secured and preparations were made for yet another move. Although the action of this tour was not as intense as the Bulldogs had encountered previously, another pilot, Second Lieutenant Hadley V. Baker, was killed when his plane was hit by anti-aircraft fire.

After more than three weeks of preparation, the transfer began. The flight echelon took off on 8 January for Samar in the Philippines Islands and after brief stops at Emirau, Hollandia, Owi, and Peleliu,



the planes landed at Guiuan Strip, Samar. The remainder of the squadron made the trip by surface vessel arriving on 12 January 1945.

Living and operating conditions at Guiuan airstrip were poor even by Western Pacific standards. The runway was still being constructed and there was inadequate space provided for the proper dispersal of aircraft. Five planes were damaged while taking off and landing, due partly to the limited runway available and partly to pilot error. In spite of the miserable operating conditions, VMF-223 flew combat sweeps over Southern Luzon, Lingayan, Cebu, Mindanao, Negros, and other islands in the Philippines.

Second Lieutenant Kenneth G. Pomasl was reported missing in action on 23 January 1945. On the afternoon of the 29th, he returned to the base by way of Baybay, Burauen, and Tacloban. The following is an account of his adventure:

On the day he became lost from his flight of four aircraft, he flew around until he was low on gas. Letting down through the overcast, he found himself over land, which later turned out to be Mactan Island off Cebu. He made a power landing in the water, one-half mile from land, and got out of the plane. After inflating his rubber boat, he climbed in and secured his backpack and shoes, which he had removed in the water, to the raft. Almost immediately, three native canoes came out to him, and Lieutenant Pomasl was transferred to one of the canoes while his rubber raft was placed on another. The Japs from Mactan Island started shooting at the party and everyone went into the water. Lieutenant Pomasl did not see his native friends after this. His raft which had fallen into the water, drifted into shore, and soon a Japanese soldier paddled out in it. When he came within two hundred feet of Pomasl he began to aim a rifle, but the pilot fired first with his .45. After exchanging several more shots the Jap paddled back to shore and was seen no more.

Lieutenant Pomasl waited until after dark before swimming into shore. When he landed on the shore, he had been in the water for more than seven hours. He went into the jungle which came down almost to the water's edge, and finding a place to his liking remained there all that night and the next day and the following night. He had a canteen full of water but no food, and he was plagued with mosquitoes. At noon of the second day after his landing, the 25th of January, he set out walking northward for awhile, but the coral hurt his feet (he had lost his shoes with the raft) and he reversed his direction, moving south and west. After about three-fourths of a mile, he broke into a clearing around which huts were built. Soon after he was discovered by the Filipinos who took him into the jungle again, and built a couch on which he could lie. They brought him food (eggs, boiled chicken,) and he was able to make himself understood by one of the natives who spoke a little English. That night he was transferred to a smaller island, Santa Rosa, where

he was hospitably treated. A native nurse washed his flying suit and dressed the coral cuts on his feet. On the 27th he was taken to Tingu Island, and early that day the Filipinos took him in a sailboat to Baybay, then to where he was able to contact American Army forces. He went from there to Burauen where he spent the night and the following day he returned.<sup>9</sup>

Operations from Guiuan strip were characterized by many missions during which the pilots had great difficulty finding suitable targets. The few good targets remaining were protected from air attacks because they were located among the civilian communities. The Corsairs of VMF-223 continued hitting the enemy lines of communications, his harbors, and escape routes. They kept his airfields useless by repeated attacks and steadily diminished his supply of motor transport equipment. From February through April 1945, the squadron flew missions in support of the Army's Operation VICTOR. This operation was a series of hard-fought battles aimed at driving the well-fortified Japanese out of the Philippines. During this period, four more Bulldogs were killed in action: First Lieutenant Glenn J. Amo, and Second Lieutenants Milton H. Thompson, Roy C. Pratt, and Robert Huxham.

Preparations for another move started in May 1945. The advance echelon embarked on board an LST and sailed for the squadron's new home in Okinawa where it joined MAG-14, 2d MAW. Meanwhile, the remaining pilots flew familiarization hops in the new F4U-4s which the squadron had received during May. The new Corsair had changed little in appearance, but it did have a larger engine giving the plane a maximum speed of 446 miles per hour, or 41 miles per hour faster than the F4U-1. The advance echelon reached the island of Okinawa on the morning of 29 May and began unloading equipment. On 11 June, 30 VMF-223 planes landed at Kadena Airfield, Okinawa, and operations began two days later.

On 21 June, 10 days after Second Lieutenant Alvin H. Perry was killed when his aircraft was hit by ground fire, the squadron was able to record its first enemy aircraft shot down since February 1944. The following narrative describes that action:

Four F4Us flown by First Lieutenant Martin T. Tiernan, John C. Groot, Arthur C. Evans, and Second Lieutenant Roy A. McAlister, Jr., participated in a successful interception of enemy fighters while flying a barrier combat air patrol between Yokoate and Kikai Islands at 1830, 21 June 1945. After a routine and negative mission, the planes were vectored to reported enemy aircraft 10 miles northwest of Tokuno Shima. Flying at an altitude of 10,000 feet, on a general heading



USMC Photo 78262-A

*A flight of Marine Corsairs returning from a mission somewhere in the Pacific. VMF-223 flew the famed Corsair during WWII.*

of 180 degrees, Lieutenant Tiernan spotted a formation of fighter planes composed of three four-plane divisions heading approximately north at 8,000 feet. Thinking that they were Army P-47s, the four F4Us went down in a recognition run. The sun which was low in the west obscured the wing markings until the planes were within 200 yards. At that time the formation was discovered to be an enemy flight of 12 Tojos.\* The Japanese planes were flying with all 12 nearly abreast with two divisions in the center and a section on either wing.

Lieutenant Tiernan and his wingman immediately attacked the right section. Tiernan closed to within 50 yards at an indicated airspeed of 280 knots before shooting the enemy wingman down with one short burst which hit the cockpit. . . . He was turning to get the section leader when he noticed tracers coming past his right wing, and he pulled up as Lieutenant Groot closed to 50 yards and shot the plane down with two short bursts . . . Both enemy planes went down in increasingly steeper dives, smoking, and crashed into the water.

. . . at the same time Lieutenant's Evans and McAlister were attacking the section which was flying on

the left wing of the formation. Both pilots followed the tactics which Lieutenant Tiernan and Groot used, and each accounted for a plane.

. . . None of the enemy planes showed any disposition to fight, and scattered at the initial contact, jettisoning what appeared to be bombs of approximately 250 pounds in size.

The remaining eight planes were able to reach a large cloud bank laying east of Yokoate Island, at which time contact was broken off. Had he (Lieutenant Tiernan) instructed his flight to attack when he first sighted the enemy, he feels certain that at least four other planes might have been accounted for. In view of the regrettable losses due to over zealous pilots who have shot down friendly planes, it is considered that Lieutenant Tiernan showed excellent judgment. When it became apparent that the enemy had managed to escape in the weather, the flight returned without incident . . .

In the initial interception by this squadron, using F4U-4s, the pilots expressed keen satisfaction with the new plane. . . . The F4U-4 proved it could outclimb, outdive, and outfly the Tojo, and since the enemy aircraft did not stay to find out, it is thought that the Tojo pilots shared this opinion.<sup>10</sup>

By the end of June 1945, operations on Kadena had ceased and VMF-223 was ordered to Awase

\*Tojo—a single-engine Japanese fighter armed with four .50 caliber guns with a few equipped with two wing or cowlings mounted 40mm cannons.

Airfield on the eastern coast of Okinawa. Early July saw the Bulldogs conducting strikes against Sakishima Gunto and fighter sweeps over Kyushu, the southernmost island of Japan. Now for the first time, squadron pilots saw the homeland of Japan and China when they escorted units of the U.S. fleet north along the Chinese coast. Virtually no enemy planes rose to challenge U.S. supremacy of the air.

Although the Japanese pilots were unable to knock down VMF-223 aircraft, three pilots were lost during July. First Lieutenant William V. Everett failed to return from a fighter sweep over Kyushu on 16 July. On the 23d, Second Lieutenant Otto A. Mittelstadt crashed after apparently becoming disoriented when his division flew into a cloud bank. The following day, Second Lieutenant Ward B. Kindlesparger, Jr., was killed as the result of a mid-air collision with First Lieutenant Guy M. Oliver. Both planes exploded upon impact, and although Lieutenant Oliver managed to bail out safely, no trace of Lieutenant Kindlesparger was found.

On 15 August 1945, official word was received that the war was over. The squadron, however, continued to fly combat air patrol in the event some of the more fanatical Japanese tried to make one last effort against the Americans.

During a defensive patrol on 16 August, a division of Corsairs sighted what appeared to be a "Wolf Pack" of Japanese submarines in formation. After the flight received permission to attack from the central fighter director on Okinawa, the planes dived on the submerged targets. Before any ordnance was expended, the "submarines" began spouting water and the target was then recognized as a group of whales. The pilots pulled out and departed the area thankful they had not embarrassed themselves further by attacking the defenseless whales.

The month of August had begun with the men of VMF-223 enthusiastically preparing for the invasion of the Japanese home islands. When peace became a reality, the Bulldogs expected to be called upon to serve as part of the occupational forces assigned throughout Japan. As time passed and no orders were received, the officers and men of VMF-223 realized that their job was done.

The Bulldogs continued to conduct combat air patrols supporting minesweeping operations north and west of Amami O Shima. The Marines remained on alert for some attempt by the enemy to strike against the arsenal developing on Okinawa. All observations, however, indicated an acceptance of

the surrender and a recognition of the cessation of hostilities. The squadron gradually adopted a peacetime routine which included air shows to demonstrate U.S. air power, surveillance missions, and an active athletic program for the men. Training hops became the primary flight activity. Fighter tactics continued to be emphasized and extended navigational training flights were made over Japan.

Constant construction and repair of squadron facilities was required as several typhoons hit Okinawa. One typhoon, with winds of 110 knots, remained in the area for an entire day. The camp area was totally destroyed and a majority of the aircraft received damage to the control surfaces.

On the morning of 15 December 1945, two pilots, Second Lieutenants Arthur J. Halenkamp and Stanley K. Kazorski were killed in a mid-air collision four miles north of Ie Shima. Another accident occurred on 14 January 1946 during a familiarization hop. Second Lieutenant George Jackson, a new pilot in the squadron, accidentally went into an inverted spin and crashed near the village of Suga, Tiara. Lieutenant Jackson and a civilian woman on the ground were killed in the crash and three other civilians were injured.

On 24 January 1946, after more than three years of involvement in the war, VMF-223 ceased flight operations and began preparing for transfer to the United States. The squadron had earned two Presidential Unit Citations, one at Guadalcanal and the other at Okinawa. The first commanding officer, Captain John L. Smith, had won the Medal of Honor for his actions over Guadalcanal. Six pilots had become air aces winning two Navy Crosses, three Distinguished Flying Crosses, and six Air Medals. The Bulldogs were returning home as a proven combat unit.

#### *A Force in Readiness: 1946-1950*

On 3 February 1946, the flight echelon of VMF-223 boarded the escort carrier USS *Cape Gloucester* (CVE 109) and sailed for San Diego on 6 February. After a brief stop at Guam from 9 through 14 February, the ship continued on to NAS, North Island, San Diego, arriving on 28 February. The rear echelon, meanwhile, had embarked on board the escort carrier USS *Prince William* (CVE 31) and began its journey home on 12 February. By 2 March, the squadron was located at the Marine Corps Air Depot (MCAD), Miramar, San Diego, and was reassigned to MAG-33, Marine Air West Coast.



Before the unit became comfortable at Miramar, word was received to prepare for a move to MCAS, El Toro. On 11 March, the squadron was at El Toro and was able to resume its flying.

Although the Bulldogs experienced postwar attrition in personnel, they did receive some personnel from Marine Torpedo Bomber Squadron (VMTB) 233, VMF-511, and Carrier Aircraft Service Detachment (CASD) 10 when these units were deactivated in March 1946. Fulfilling its primary mission of training personnel for carrier and land-based operations in the Pacific, VMF-223 conducted flight training which included familiarization, gunnery, night flying, section and division tactics, navigation, instruments, and field carrier landing practice.

Flight operations were plagued by numerous aircraft accidents. Although some of the accidents were caused by material failure, most were the result of pilot error. On 20 June 1946, a Corsair crashed while landing at El Toro. It appeared as though the pilot, after touching down, reached for the flap lever and by mistake, pulled the wheels lever, retracting the landing gear.

August 1946 was an exceptionally bad month for the squadron. Three planes were either destroyed or seriously damaged while landing or taking off. On 23 August, an aircraft was destroyed when the pilot tried to abort a takeoff and skidded off the runway. On the 26th, an aircraft was taxied into a truck that was being used in construction work on the runway. The next day, a plane swerved off the runway because of faulty brakes. The Corsair then ran into a ditch, sheared off both wheels, and flipped over.

During the autumn of 1946, the squadron continued to train. Five pilots qualified for carrier landing on board the USS *Shangri-La* (CV 38) in September. On 10 October, a pilot "spun in" during field carrier landing practice when he lost control in the turbulent air which is often encountered when there is not enough interval between landing aircraft. Five days later, 13 pilots went on board the USS *Rendova* (CVE 114) for carrier qualifications. During the short cruise, one aircraft crashed into the catwalk when the pilot failed to level his wings upon touchdown.

As another form of training, the Bulldogs, along with planes from the Army and the Navy, participated in the first large-scale postwar amphibious exercise. From 21 through 27 November, the squadron flew support missions for the Army's 2d Infantry Division at San Clemente Island and on the



USMC Photo A 707811

*Major Michael R. Yunck led the squadron from 10 June 1947 to 6 March 1948.*

mainland near Oceanside, California. On 12 January 1947, VMF-223 participated in its third air show since arriving at El Toro. This show, a function of National Preparedness Week, gave the Bulldogs a chance to show their skills in gunnery, glide bombing, and rocket firing.

The squadron was next involved in flying simulated air support for a mock amphibious landing on 13 March. This exercise was followed on 22 through 24 March by Operation CONFUSION. During this operation, VMF-223 remained in an alert status and was scrambled to intercept and "attack" convoys of a U.S. task force operating off the coast of southern California.

On 9 June 1947, VMF-223 was converted into a transitional training unit with the mission of training transport and bomber pilots in the Corsair. On 10 June, Major Michael R. Yunck took command.\*The syllabus was divided into two phases: the first phase was conducted in the SNJ trainer and the second phase in the Corsair. Unfortunately, the squadron continued to average an accident per month as new pilots attempted to master the fighter aircraft.

During the months that followed, the Bulldogs were involved in intensive training. By September 1947, 74 pilots had completed training and were

---

\*Yunck, who retired in 1967 as a colonel, was a World War II ace and the winner of two silver stars. In 1963 he was selected as the second recipient of the Alfred A. Cunningham trophy as the Marine aviator of the year. Colonel Yunck was critically wounded in Vietnam while flying as a co-pilot in a helicopter, and as a result of these wounds his right leg was amputated.

transferred to tactical squadrons. On 3 October, VMF-223 ceased to function as a fighter transition unit and to the joy of all squadron members, the Bulldogs once again resumed operations as a VMF.

The change in mission assignment did not, unfortunately, stop the pilots from having accidents. On a flight from Litchfield Park, Arizona to El Paso, Texas on 19 December, eight Corsairs strayed from the intended course and ran low on fuel. While approaching Carlsbad, New Mexico, one of the pilots reported a low fuel warning light and headed into the nearest field, Carlsbad municipal airport. As the pilot circled to land, the engine began to sputter. Assuming that he was out of fuel, the pilot attempted to make a downwind emergency landing on the 4,000-foot strip. During the approach he found himself high and fast, a logical situation to expect when attempting to land downwind. When the Corsair finally touched down, there was only 1,500 feet of runway remaining. The pilot immediately applied both brakes but the aircraft continued off the runway. After hitting a pole that sheared off the left wing and crushing a fence, the F4U came to rest.

Throughout January and February 1948, the squadron flew simulated close air support missions for the 1st Marine Division units undergoing amphibious training in the Aliso Canyon area. For 33 days the Bulldogs operated under simulated combat conditions from the newly designated Marine Corps Auxiliary Airfield, Camp Pendleton.

An operational readiness inspection was conducted by the 1st MAW\* on 8 March. The inspection consisted of three parts: The first part required the squadron to plan and conduct a mass attack on a designated target; next, the pilots demonstrated their skills in flying close air support; and the final phase included gunnery, navigation, bombing, rocket firing, instrument flying, and field carrier landings. When the scores were announced at the conclusion of the inspection, VMF-223 received the highest score of all MAG-33 squadrons.

VMF-223 was detached from MAG-33 on 7 June 1948 and reassigned to MAG-14, 2d MAW, located at MCAS, Cherry Point, North Carolina. The flight echelon, consisting of three flights of eight F4Us landed at Cherry Point on 10 June without a mishap. On 1 August, Marine "Fighting" Squadron 223 was redesignated Marine "Fighter" Squadron 223 and was reassigned to MAG-11.

---

\*On 1 October 1947, Marine Air West Coast was redesignated the 1st Marine Aircraft Wing.

The squadron immediately undertook a rigorous schedule of field carrier landing practice in preparation for the upcoming carrier qualifications. On 23 August, 10 pilots flew to Norfolk, Virginia where they joined other fleet pilots on board the escort carrier USS *Palau* (CVE 122) for a three-day qualification cruise. The training was completed without an accident, but one veteran pilot, Captain William E. Cannon, died of disease. On the 23d, Captain Cannon reported to the dispensary with symptoms of polio, and when the pilots returned from carrier qualifications, they learned their friend had died of respiratory poliomyelitis.

Extensive field carrier landing practice and tactical air exercises were the primary operational commitments during the remainder of the summer. Flight training was temporarily interrupted on 28 August when the squadron was directed to evacuate all aircraft because of an approaching hurricane. Twenty planes were immediately launched for Cleveland, Ohio, where they remained for five days.

After a month of training at Cherry Point, the squadron made another deployment, this time to Barin Field, Alabama, located near Pensacola, Florida. Arriving on 17 October 1948, the pilots immediately began field carrier landing practice. Before the first day of this deployment was over, the squadron had an accident. First Lieutenant Dwayne E. Adams crashed during takeoff and was killed.

After returning to Cherry Point, the squadron hardly had time to celebrate the Marine Corps birthday on 10 November before it was again preparing for another short cruise. On 15 November a detachment of aircraft departed for Norfolk and boarded the carrier USS *Saipan* (CVL 48). Before the flight returned on 18 November, each pilot had qualified with at least 10 carrier landings. During this training period, the commanding officer, Major Richard W. Wyczawski, made the 17,000th landing on board the *Saipan*.

During November and December, the squadron began its fixed gunnery training syllabus. By the holidays, most of the pilots had completed this phase of training and were given leave. One pilot who did not take leave, Captain John Callahan, the squadron flight officer, was killed on the morning of 24 December 1948, when his F4U crashed into Little Lake about seven miles west of Cherry Point.

After the turn of the year, the members of VMF-223 began preparing for their next deployment. On 15 February 1949, 24 aircraft departed for the Naval



Air Station, Roosevelt Roads, Puerto Rico. The Bulldogs, for the next three and a half weeks, participated in maneuvers with U.S. naval units in the Caribbean. After completing this training, the unit departed for home arriving at Cherry Point on 14 March.

Routine training kept the Bulldogs busy until 14 July when the unit deployed to MCAS, Edenton, North Carolina. While deployed the pilots became proficient in carrier flight procedures by conducting simulated shipboard operations from Edenton and Fenterss Field, a deactivated Navy field near Oceana, Virginia. Returning to Cherry Point on 30 July, the squadron immediately began preparation for another short cruise. On 7 August, the squadron boarded the carrier USS *Franklin D. Roosevelt* (CVB 42) at Norfolk for nearly two weeks of training at sea.

For the men of VMF-223, arriving back at Cherry Point meant performing the necessary maintenance on the planes, packing the squadron equipment, and saying goodbye to their families. The unit was about to leave for an extended cruise to the Mediterranean. On 31 August 1949, the squadron journeyed to NAS, Quonset Point, Rhode Island where it boarded the carrier USS *Leyte* (CV 32). The *Leyte* sailed for the British colony of Gibraltar on 6 September and after extensive maneuvering to avoid a hurricane docked on 15 September. One week later the ship sailed again, this time for Malta where the pilots flew air support for a 21st Marines Battalion Landing Team (BLT) exercise. During one phase of the training, squadron aircraft were making simulated attacks on a carrier when an external fuel tank broke loose from one of the Corsairs and narrowly missed the ship. As a result, future "attacks" on ships of the Sixth Fleet were limited to 15 degree dives and 250 knots.

For the five and a half months the squadron was embarked on board the *Leyte*, VMF-223 showed its presence throughout the Mediterranean. The following is a chronological listing of the squadron's movement while deployed with the Sixth Fleet:

September 1949	Malta, Sardinia, France
October 1949	Malta, Greece, Cyprus
November 1949	Greece, Italy, Sicily
December 1949	Sicily, Italy
January 1950	North Africa, Gibraltar

The Bulldogs departed Gibraltar on 17 January 1950, after having conducted extensive training and support missions throughout the Mediterranean. After unloading at Norfolk, the squadron proceeded to Cherry Point arriving on 29 January 1950. Finally

home, the Bulldogs of VMF-223 were confident that they were a force in readiness capable of carrying out their mission anywhere in the world.

### *Entering the Jet Age*

Shortly after returning from duty in the Mediterranean, VMF-223 underwent an almost total changeover in personnel. Since practically all the unit's experienced pilots had been transferred, the Bulldogs faced a major training program in order to regain their proficiency as a combat ready force. The squadron concentrated on basic air work, air-to-air gunnery, and rocket firing. By the end of spring 1950, the pilots of VMF-223 had achieved good proficiency, and tactics and dive bombing were being emphasized in training.

In early May 1950, the squadron learned that it would receive the McDonnell F2H Banshee to replace the F4U-4s. Operations were then centered on preparing and training for the new aircraft. On 16 May 1950, Major Thomas G. Bronleewe took command of the squadron.\* Flight operations were interrupted on 25 June 1950 when the unit was put on alert in response to North Korea's surprise invasion of South Korea. All aircraft were scrambled for combat air patrols on 25 and 26 June, but the alert was cancelled on the 27th and the unit resumed its normal training schedule.

The squadron was informed on 5 July 1950, that it would immediately begin receiving the new Grumman F9F Panther aircraft instead of the F2Hs. By 23 July the Bulldogs possessed 12 F9F-2 jet aircraft. The Panther was a single-seated fighter and could be either carrier or land based. Powered by a Pratt and Whitney engine with 5,750 pounds of thrust, the aircraft's primary mission was the destruction of opposing aircraft. The F9F could carry four fuselage-mounted 20mm guns, up to six 500-pound bombs, and two six-shot rocket packs. The total ordnance capacity was 3,465 pounds.<sup>11</sup> Because of the ejection seat in the jet, all pilots had to go to the Naval Air Material Center at Philadelphia for training in the ejection seat.

On 1 September 1950, VMF-223 was transferred from MAG-11 to MAG-14 at Cherry Point. The operating strength of the squadron was increased as numerous reservists were assigned for training.

\*Bronleewe went on to a distinguished career and commanded MAG-32 when it deployed for the Cuban crisis in 1962.



USMC Photo 530003

*A VMF-223 Grumman F9F-4 Panther jet set for takeoff at Cherry Point, North Carolina. The Panther was a land- and carrier-based, low-wing monoplane with the primary mission of destroying enemy aircraft.*

Major John M. Winkler, USAF, joined the unit on 2 October to become the first Air Force representative to be assigned to VMF-223 under the pilot exchange program.

The squadron was placed on alert on 19 November and again on 6 December. With each alert, the Bulldogs made final preparations in expectation of movement orders to Korea. With no change in the squadron's status, the Bulldogs resumed normal training and prepared for possible combat. The syllabus for the new jets consisted of familiarization flights, section and division tactics, instruments, rocket firing, gunnery, night radar-controlled bombing, and occasional ground-controlled intercept flights with Marine Air Control Group 1.

The next phase of training for the pilots was carrier qualifications, and from 11 to 23 February 1951, 18 aircraft were deployed to NAS, Cecil Field, Jacksonville, Florida, for field carrier landing practice. The Bulldogs returned to Jacksonville on 7 May for the final period of field carrier landing practice before actual qualifications at sea. During this training, the unit had its first accident in the new jets. A squadron F9F had just become airborne when it was struck in the rear by a Navy F2H maneuvering over the field for a landing. The Panther pilot brought his jet in for a crash landing and suffered a back injury when the disabled aircraft hit a stump after skidding off the runway.

On 19 June the squadron went on board the USS

*Franklin D. Roosevelt* for carrier qualifications. In addition to the qualifications, the Bulldogs flew simulated combat missions in support of the Ninth Secretary of Defense Joint Civilian Orientation Cruise on 2 July. For its outstanding performance of duty while deployed with the *Roosevelt*, the Commanding General, Fleet Marine Force, Atlantic, Lieutenant General Leroy P. Hunt, presented the squadron with a Letter of Appreciation. On 4 July, VMF-223 left the ship at Norfolk and returned to Cherry Point.

After one month on dry land, it was back to sea for the Bulldogs. This time it was on the carrier USS *Tarawa* (CV 40) which the squadron boarded on 3 August while it was moored at NAS, Quonset Point. The squadron was soon involved in Air Defense Exercise FOX during which the unit defended the task force against land-based aggressor aircraft. Upon returning to Cherry Point on 12 August, VMF-223 immediately departed for the Army's Camp Pendleton in Virginia in support of Operation CAMID IV, a combined cadet/midshipman exercise. The hard work and the constant deployment of VMF-223 was rewarded in August when the unit was given the Commanding General, 2d MAF's Semi-Annual Efficiency Trophy for the period of January through June 1951.

The Bulldogs did not rest long before they were off again on another deployment to NAS, Norfolk and participation in Operation LANT FLEX 52. On 14

September, the entire complement of 24 F9Fs was hoisted on board the USS *Saipan* bound for Roosevelt Roads. By 1 October, VMF-223 was flying extensive close air support missions for 2d Marine Division units involved in the fleet exercise. On 30 October 1951, the squadron boarded the USS *Midway* (CVB 42) and sailed for North Carolina. While the unit was deployed on board the *Midway*, the Bulldogs conducted fighter sweeps and air combat patrol missions until the task force arrived off Camp Lejeune. The pilots then returned to flying close air support as the 2d Division units stormed ashore on Onslow Beach. The training missions were completed on 17 November and VMF-223 returned home to Cherry Point.

With the squadron back in garrison, mechanics worked many hours performing maintenance on the aircraft. Even with this extra effort by the maintenance department, aircraft availability decreased and the tempo of operations was reduced until March 1952 when the unit received a complement of F9F-4s to replace the older jets. On 19 March the Bulldogs flew the new jets to Roosevelt Roads in support of 2d Marine Division units involved in Operation ANGLEX 52. The exercise provided excellent training for the pilots and flight operations were completely successful.

An accident occurred in mid-April which restricted the use of the F9F-4s. During a routine gunnery hop, a pilot felt heavy vibrations which seemed to be coming from the engine of his jet. The pilot returned to the field and when he was on final approach, the engine quit. The plane crashed approximately 1,000 feet short of the runway. The pilot was not injured, but the jet was destroyed. A subsequent investigation revealed that four other squadron aircraft had similar defects in the engines. Permission was obtained to return the remaining aircraft to Cherry Point on 19 April, and nine days later all F9F-4s were grounded until a modification was made on the engines.

Throughout this period, pilots scheduled for assignment to Korea received first priority for training, including field carrier landing practice at Edenton. In addition to the routine training, the squadron provided close air support on 13 June for Operation TRAEX I-PHASE II at Camp Lejeune and participated in an air show for the Commandant of the Marine Corps, General Lemuel C. Shepherd, Jr., at Camp Lejeune on 1 July.

August 1952 found the unit involved in supporting

amphibious training at Onslow Beach. This exercise, Operation PHIBEX 1-53, was the first simulated atomic threat training for the squadron. By late September VMF-223 was again bound for Roosevelt Roads, this time with 21 planes in support of Operation TRAEX II-PHASE I. After a successful deployment, the detachment returned to Cherry Point on 28 October. The final exercise of the year for the Bulldogs was on 10 November 1952. During Operation TRAEX II-PHASE II, held at Onslow Beach, the squadron participated in its first joint amphibious/helicopter assault. For the Bulldogs the year ended on a sad note; Captain Douglas F. Hollingsworth and Second Lieutenant Harold G. Brown were killed when their planes collided while they were on a cross-country flight.

After the turn of the new year, the squadron began preparing for a carrier deployment to the Caribbean. For two and a half weeks in January, VMF-223 was at NAS, Oceana, Virginia for field carrier landing practice. On 16 February 1953, 26 squadron Panthers departed for Naval Auxiliary Air Station, Mayport, Florida, where the jets were hoisted on board the attack carrier USS *Bennington* (CVA 20). The ground echelon was already on board having joined the ship at Norfolk. The carrier left Florida on the 24th and headed for Cuba. The squadron cruised the Caribbean as part of the force in readiness until it returned to Cherry Point on 10 May. The Panthers hardly had time to cool before the squadron boarded the attack carrier USS *Antietam* (CVA 36) at Norfolk for a short deployment. This time the unit participated in a demonstration for observers from the Armed Forces Staff College and the Industrial College of the Armed Forces.

New landing techniques using the canted deck carrier were tested and demonstrations were given of the effectiveness of accurate ordnance delivery in close air support. Returning to Cherry Point on 30 May 1953, the squadron resumed training pilots bound for Korea.

Marine Fighter Squadron 223's role as a training squadron ended on 7 August 1953 when the unit boarded naval shipping at Morehead City, North Carolina and sailed for Japan. On 11 September the squadron arrived at Yokosuka, Japan and then proceeded to NAS, Atsugi where it was assigned to MAG-11, 1st MAW. The Bulldogs conducted normal training operations, including close air support for Marine ground units at Camp Fuji, until May 1954.



USMC Photo A346121

*Boston Red Sox baseball star Ted Williams receives a check out on a new instrument panel with other Marine Corps fighter pilots. Captain Williams was called to active duty for the Korean War.*

Later that month a small detachment of F9Fs was undergoing aerial gunnery training at Nigato Air Force Base when an overly zealous pilot continued his run on a towed target until it was too late to avoid a collision. Fortunately, there was no injury to the pilot and only minor damage to the jet as the incident was followed by a normal landing. Another accident occurred on 16 June when the right landing gear on one of the Panthers collapsed on landing roll-out. The aircraft left the runway and collided with a number of bomb trailers. The accident resulted in substantial damage to the plane and destroyed 33 bomb trailers. Luckily, the pilot escaped serious injury.

During the squadron's tour of duty in Japan, two famous baseball players were members of the outfit. Ted Williams, the well-known left fielder of the Boston Red Sox, was a Bulldog pilot and Jerry Coleman, a player with the New York Yankees, also served with VMF-223.

The squadron continued flight operations until it left Japan on 22 September 1954. At that time, VMF-223 was reassigned to MAG-15, Air FMFPac at MCAS, El Toro, California. On 1 December 1954, the designation of the Bulldogs was changed from Marine Fighter Squadron to Marine Attack Squadron 223. The purpose of the change was to emphasize the role of attack aviation in the Marine Corps and the dual capability inherent in the aircraft.

Operations continued at a steady pace throughout the spring of 1955. On 4 March, the squadron's first "Plane Captain of the Month" award was presented. This was an incentive for the enlisted men and carried special significance and prestige because the recipient was chosen by the squadron pilots.

From the end of June through September 1955, the Bulldogs conducted extensive training in close air support which included participation in Operations MARLEX and FIREAX at Camp Pendleton. Over 1,500 hours were flown during the three-month period which included three deployments to Marine Corps Air Facility (MCAF), Mojave. The following month, the training routine was interrupted as 12 squadron pilots flew to North Carolina and back in four days. After returning to El Toro on 20 October, VMA-223 departed for Mojave and began conducting ordnance missions which included air-to-air gunnery, dive bombing, and strafing. When the squadron returned to El Toro, it had accumulated 1,452 sorties and 2,072 flight hours during October.

Rumors of a carrier deployment to the Far East sparked the Bulldog's training schedule in early 1956. On 10 February, 16 pilots, including an attached Air Force exchange pilot, carrier qualified on board the USS *Wasp* (CV 18). The remainder of the squadron pilots completed qualifications later in the month. By March word was received that VMA-223 would go on board the *Wasp* in April for sea duty. In



USMC Photo A195035

*The North American FJ-4B Fury was used by VMA-223 as an attack aircraft.*

late March, some 22 officers and enlisted men of the unit journeyed to North Island, San Diego for a one day sea cruise. This was "ladies day" on board the aircraft carrier, and the Marines took their wives on a tour of the ship pointing out the duties that pilots and crews perform. The Bulldogs concluded preparations for embarkation on 22 April 1956 and boarded the *Wasp*.

During the 48,000-mile cruise which took the Bulldogs to Hawaii, Guam, the Philippines, Hong Kong, and Japan, the squadron operated as a unit of Carrier Air Group 15. While in Guam, VMA-223 participated in Armed Force Day observances and in the Philippines the squadron took part in commissioning ceremonies at the Navy's new air base at Cubi Point. The Bulldogs received an Air FMFPac Aviation Safety Award for the period of April through June 1956 in recognition of their accident-free operations.

The six-month tour ended in late October 1956 when the ship, with VMA-223 on board, arrived at NAS, Alameda. At 1344 on 31 October, a voice called El Toro tower, "This is Marine 6218 over Long Beach at 22,000 feet with a flight of 19 F9F aircraft." The call came from Major Victor E. Allen, commanding officer of the Bulldogs, who led the flight which brought the squadron home.<sup>12</sup>

Flight operations were again underway by early November as the squadron resumed a rigorous training schedule. Combat readiness was the keynote of future operations, and the unit participated in many simulated combat exercises. Typical of VMA-223's activities was the unit's participation in an exercise on 27 June during which 24 F9Fs from MCAF, Mojave supported the 4th Marine Corps Provisional Atomic Exercise Brigade at the Nevada test site.

In mid-August 1957, VMA-223 received the first delivery of the North American FJ-4B Fury jets. By autumn, the squadron was operating with two different models of the Fury. The FJ-4 was used for training, while the FJ-4B, a newer version, was used as an attack aircraft to carry out the mission of the squadron. Powered by a Wright engine which generated 7,800 pounds of thrust, the Fury could fly above 40,000 feet and was capable of speeds in excess of 600 knots. With external fuel tanks, this single-seat, high-performance jet had an operational range of more than 1,300 miles.<sup>13</sup>

Upon acquisition of the new aircraft, the squadron began a new training syllabus for all its pilots. Flight time was divided between routine flights at El Toro and special weapons training at China Lake. Pilots of VMA-223 completed their first air-to-air refueling with the Furys in January 1958 and soon every pilot was qualified in this new phase of tactical jet operations.

For the next two years, Marine Attack Squadron 223 remained at El Toro conducting training with occasional deployments to NAS, Fallon and other bases in the local area. Operations were focused on the attack mission of the squadron. Conventional air-to-ground deliveries and close air support using napalm, 2.75-inch rockets, and 20mm cannon played an important role in the training syllabus.

From 17 to 29 January 1960, the Bulldogs deployed to MCAS, Yuma, Arizona, a base which had recently been acquired from the Air Force. The squadron concentrated on training in special weapons delivery, conventional bombing, and air-to-ground rocketry. Close air support tactics were practiced with simulated strikes flown at 29 Palms and Camp Pendleton. On 3 June the unit was presented with its fourth AirFMFPac Quarterly Aviation Safety Award. After deployment to MCAS, Yuma and NAS Fallon during July and August 1960, the squadron won its fifth such award. This award read in part: "This achievement denotes a high degree of leadership and supervision, the employment of sound maintenance techniques, effective training programs, and excellent air discipline."<sup>14</sup>

In mid-January 1961, VMA-223 began receiving light attack aircraft to replace the squadron's FJ-4 fighter aircraft. The new aircraft assigned was the Douglas A4D-2 Skyhawk, later redesignated the A-4B. This single-seated lightweight attack bomber was much smaller but superior in performance to many operational jet fighters. Designed on a completely



USMC Photo A149220

*An A4D-2N (later known as the A-4C) Skyhawk belonging to VMA-223 parked at MCAS El Toro.*

functional basis with emphasis on simplification of structure and equipment and powered by a Wright J-65 turbojet engine which produced 7,700 pounds of thrust, the A-4B was superb for the attack role. Two 20mm cannons were mounted in the wing roots and a number of attachment points under the wings and fuselage could accommodate rockets, torpedoes, missiles, and a wide variety of bombs.<sup>11</sup> The Skyhawk could fly faster over greater distances than any other aircraft of its type. On 15 October 1955, the Skyhawk established a new world's speed record over the 500-kilometer closed circuit at Edwards AFB with a speed of 615.163 mph. Additionally, since the jet was small enough to fit standard aircraft carrier elevators without the need for folding wings, it was ideally suited for carrier operations.

Training again became paramount as the pilots adjusted to their new jet aircraft. As the aviators became accustomed to the characteristics of the Skyhawk, the combat capabilities of the unit increased. The Bulldogs demonstrated their expertise in May 1962, when they participated in Operation ESAX, a close air support exercise held at 29 Palms. Operating from El Toro, the squadron flew as many as 55 sorties a day providing close air support for ground units and assisting in the training of tactical air control parties from Camp Pendleton.

While the Bulldogs were involved in firing Bullpup missiles at ground targets at China Lake in June 1962, the squadron reached its 12,000th accident-free

hour. The squadron then turned its attention to the art of in-flight refueling. Working with the Lockheed KC-130 Hercules refuelers of VMGR-352, in-flight refueling missions continued until all pilots were qualified. The remainder of the summer was spent training at El Toro with an occasional deployment to MCAS, Yuma. On 2 November, VMA-223 deployed on board the USS *Hancock* (CVA 19) for day and night carrier qualifications which ended on 12 November.

Marine Attack Squadron 223 set a Marine Corps record in December by earning 39 Navy "E's" for "Efficiency" in ordnance competition at MCAS, Yuma. The "E" certificates, awarded to individuals for accuracy in bombing and strafing, were won by all but two of the squadron pilots who took part in the competition.

In preparation for a deployment to the Far East in March 1963, VMA-223 spent the first week of February at Yuma practicing conventional and nuclear weapons delivery and helicopter escort. Upon their return to El Toro, the Bulldogs made their final preparations prior to departing for Japan. The squadron left California on 30 March 1963 on Military Air Transport Service (MSTS) C-135 aircraft and relieved El Toro-bound VMA-211. All squadrons planes and equipment were exchanged with VMA-211, and on 2 April the Bulldogs were assigned to MAG-12, 1st MAW.

During its tour at MCAS, Iwakuni, the squadron





USMC Photo A148572

*An A-4E jet from VMA-223 is being towed to the after part of the flight deck of the USS Valley Forge (LPH 8).*

made several deployments to Okinawa and the Philippines where the Bulldog pilots concentrated on rocket firing, bomb and napalm delivery, and nuclear loft bombing. For the one year the unit was in Japan, it was ready for combat assignment with the 1st MAW, but fortunately peace prevailed and 30 March 1964, VMA-223 exchanged places with El Toro-based VMA-121. Again the squadrons swapped both aircraft and equipment. On 2 April 1964, the unit was reassigned to MAG-15, 3d MAW. Flight operations at El Toro were resumed on 14 April.

In early June VMA-223 received the new A-4E Skyhawks. The A-4E, the newest in the A-4 series, had an increased payload and operational range and was powered by a Pratt and Whitney engine which produced 8,500 pounds of thrust. Deployments to NAS, Fallon and MCAS, Yuma enabled the Bulldogs to become proficient quickly in the new jet. The squadron also sent detachments to various aircraft carriers to keep the pilots current in carrier qualifications. In April 1965, six pilots from VMA-223 set an impressive record while on board the USS *Yorktown* (CVS 10). With only four Skyhawks, the pilots made 1,200 carrier landings without a mishap. The squadron safety record was now one of the most envied in the Marine Corps. During fiscal years 1957 through 1964, VMA-223 earned 17 quarterly safety

awards. This was truly an admirable record that was to be improved in the future.

### *Vietnam*

On 1 September 1965, VMA-223 departed NAS, North Island on board the helicopter carrier USS *Valley Forge* (LPH 8). The Bulldogs arrived at MCAS, Iwakuni, Japan on 15 September where they were assigned to MAG-13, 1st MAW. The squadron remained in Japan training until 15 December. Then, under the command of Lieutenant Colonel Alexander Wilson, it joined MAG-12 at Chu Lai, Vietnam, relieving VMA-311 which returned to Japan after operating in Vietnam since 1 June 1965. Before the day had ended, VMA-223 had flown its first combat mission in Vietnam.

Marine Attack Squadron 223 was involved initially with Operation HARVEST MOON which had begun on 8 December. HARVEST MOON was a coordinated USMC/Army of the Republic of Vietnam (ARVN) operation conducted midway between Da Nang and Chu Lai about 15 miles inland. For the Marines, this was the largest operation since their arrival in Vietnam. Major participating ground units were 2d Battalion, 7th Marines; 2d Battalion, 1st Marines; 3d Battalion, 3d Marines; 1st Battalion,

5th ARVN Regiment; 11th ARVN Ranger Battalion; and the 1st Battalion, 6th ARVN Regiment. Aviation units included fixed-wing aircraft from MAGs -11 and -12 and helicopters from MAGs -16 and -36. By the time HARVEST MOON ended on 20 December, all the Bulldog pilots had flown with MAG-12 flights and considered themselves combat veterans.<sup>16</sup>

From 1800 on 24 December until 2400 on the 25th, a 30-hour Christmas cease-fire was observed by American forces. During this period, air operations were limited to fixed-wing helicopter escort and helicopter logistical and administrative flights. Besides flying a few of these missions, the VMA-223 personnel spent that time improving the defensive positions in the squadron area and adding a personal touch to the working and living spaces.

The weather, for flying purposes, was generally good in January but during Operation MALLARD, January 10-13, it tested the pilots' instrument capabilities. With the assistance of ground control radar, TPQ-10, the pilots were able to deliver their bombs without visual contact with the target. The rainy weather also had its effect on the airfield facilities. By 16 January so much of the northern

portion of the 8,000-foot runway was undermined that the Seabees had to begin extensive repairs. Meanwhile, air operations from Chu Lai continued. With the absence of half the runway, the pilots were forced to use jet-assisted takeoffs (JATO) and MOREST (arrested) landings.

On 3 February, VMA-223 established a new record for the number of sorties flown by a MAG-12 squadron in a 24-hour period. Launching its first sortie at 0837, the squadron flew 59 combat sorties and two test hops before the last sortie was recovered exactly 18 hours and 37 minutes later. The Bulldogs gained the spotlight again on the 19th when First Lieutenant Durwood K. Schnell returned from a mission to discover that his flight represented the 20,000th combat flight hour for Chu Lai-based aircraft.

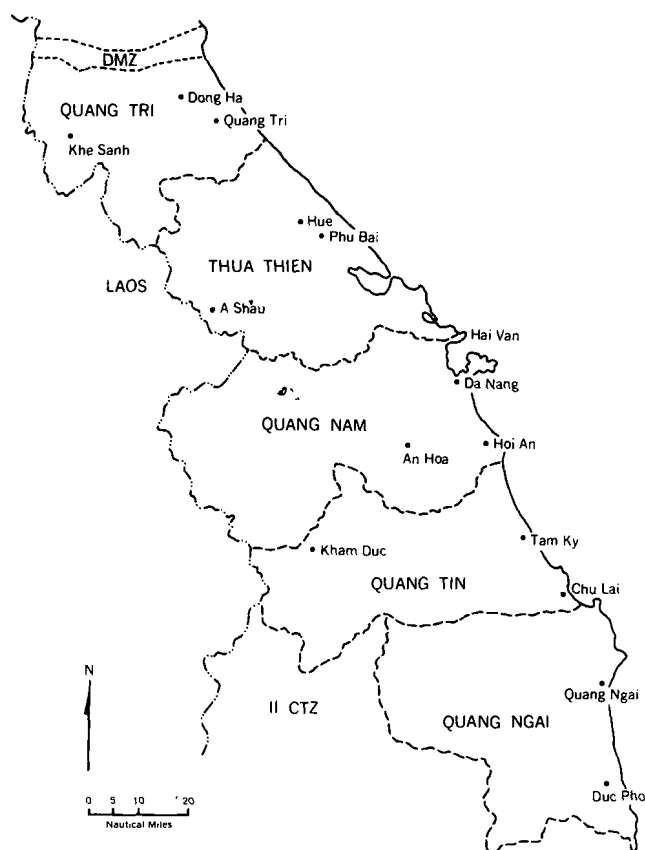
During the entire month of February, VMA-223 and other MAG-12 units supported Operation DOUBLE EAGLE which was conducted in two phases. Phase I began 28 January in the area 20 miles southeast of Quang Ngai City and involved four USMC infantry battalions and supporting units. Although the fighting was sporadic, Marine air and ground units accounted for 312 enemy killed during five days of operations.

During PHASE II the Marines swept the Quang Ngai area and then turned their attention to Tam Ky which was about 25 miles north of Chu Lai. Here the Marine air-ground team accounted for another 125 enemy dead.

On 3 March, eight USMC/ARVN infantry battalions teamed up and conducted Operation UTAH. VMA-223 and other MAG-12 squadrons pounded the enemy for five days during which they delivered over 186 tons of ordnance while the friendly ground units advanced. The result of this air-ground effort was 586 members of the *21st North Vietnamese Army (NVA) Regiment* killed. By the end of March, the squadron had accumulated a monthly flight time of more than 1,000 hours.

Although runway facilities were limited while the Seabees were making the necessary repairs, and many flights were conducted in less than favorable weather conditions, the squadron continued the high tempo of operations without a single aircraft accident.

When the commanding officer of VMA-223, Lieutenant Colonel Robert B. Sinclair, returned from a mission on 29 April, he was met at the airfield by







USMC Photo A370858

*A Skyhawk from VMA-223 being loaded with napalm at Chu Lai, Vietnam. VMA-223, as part of MAG-12, worked out of Chu Lai in support of III MAF operations in South Vietnam.*

Colonel Leslie E. Brown,\* the commanding officer of MAG-12. The reason for the greeting was to congratulate the Bulldog leader for flying the squadron's 10,000th accident-free hour. Lieutenant Colonel Sinclair attributed the safety record to the professional attitude of the maintenance crews, ordnance teams, ground crews, and the pilots.

Captain James R. Shea and First Lieutenant Harvey F. Crouch, Jr., were on alert status on 6 May when the word came to launch. Within minutes the pilots were airborne and on their way to the target, a friendly outpost 30 miles south of Chu Lai under attack by VC forces. Naval gunfire was lifted as the A-4s arrived over the target 15 minutes later. The heavily armed jets orbited the target until a forward

air controller (FAC) in a light observation plane reported that he had spotted about 40 Viet Cong in trench lines only 150 meters from the ARVN forces. The Skyhawks immediately began hitting the trenches with napalm. After expending all their bombs, the pilots began spraying the area with 20mm fire. By the time the two Bulldogs pulled off target, 20 VC had been killed, 19 structures destroyed, and the enemy attack came to an abrupt end.

On 14 May the JATO bottles were put away and replaced by a bi-directional catapult system. This catapult was powered by two jet engines, the same as those in the Phantom jet fighter, and could launch an aircraft either north or south. For all practical purposes, Chu Lai was an aircraft carrier, minus the water.

During the afternoon of 3 June 1966, a VMA-223 plane was shot down and the pilot killed while attacking VC troops in the open approximately 75 miles south of Chu Lai in II Corps. Captain Ralph W.

---

\*Colonel Brown was promoted to lieutenant general in 1975 and became the Chief of Staff, Headquarters, U. S. Marine Corps and later, in 1977, Commanding General, FMFPac.

Caspole, flying the lead position in a two-plane section, had expended his Mark-77 napalm bombs and was strafing with 20mm fire when his jet burst into fire as he was pulling out of a run. The A-4 crashed near the target area and the wingman plus two other Skyhawks of VMA-223, which were diverted to provide rescue cover, orbited the area while helicopters searched for the downed pilot. The rescue operations were terminated after it was apparent the pilot had not survived the crash.<sup>17</sup>

On 16 June, a squadron section standing alert duty was once again scrambled. The flight, led by Captain Lynn A. Hale, launched at about 0350 to provide emergency close air support for a U. S. Marine reconnaissance patrol of 18 men. The patrol, which was on Hill 488 in Quang Tin Province, was being overrun by an estimated regiment of NVA. By the time Captain Hale and his wingman arrived on target, another flight that was on station providing support had just expended its ordnance and was departing. Captain Hale, aware of the four enemy .50 caliber guns in the area, began the attack depending on the illumination from flares to locate the enemy. The Skyhawks made repeated runs flying low over the mountainous terrain delivering their ordnance with extreme accuracy while under fire from the enemy machineguns. With their ammunition expended and the enemy advance apparently stalled, the flight returned to base. Shortly after sunrise the section was again scrambled to assist the Marine patrol. Once again the duo attacked the enemy allowing the patrol to move to safety. For his actions during these missions, Captain Hale was awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross.

While eight large-unit operations were conducted in July 1966, the majority of VMA-223's missions supported Operation HASTINGS just south of the DMZ. Operation HASTINGS, which began on 7 July, was the largest Marine/ARVN offensive operation to date, involving seven USMC and five ARVN battalions. The enemy consisted of three regiments of the *324B NVA Division*. Before the first NVA attack could be launched, ground units supported by Skyhawks, Phantoms, and numerous flights of helicopters hit the enemy and drove them back across the DMZ. When HASTINGS ended on 3 August, the enemy toll was 824 killed and 14 captured. The air-ground team had done its job well.<sup>18</sup>

Personnel shortages became a problem during August. Squadron members who had completed their overseas tours rotated back to the United States

and replacements were not arriving fast enough to keep the unit at combat strength. This did not seem to hamper the Bulldogs' performance. During the month each pilot averaged 32 sorties and 41 hours of flight time as the squadron accumulated a total of 1,100 flight hours.

In September 1966, VMA-223 reached its low point in personnel strength with only 18 aviators, 6 ground officers, and 132 enlisted men assigned. Considering the unit had 32 officers and 184 enlisted men in June, this was a significant reduction. Even with this reduced number of personnel, the squadron logged 925 sorties and 1,216 flight hours while receiving a bomb damage assessment (BDA) of 238 structures either destroyed or damaged, 30 secondary explosions, 26 enemy killed, 18 storage bunkers destroyed, 5 bridges either damaged or destroyed, and numerous supply routes hit. The only damage to the squadron's jets was one hit by small arms fire through the right wing of First Lieutenant Robert Ticken, Jr.'s A-4 and a small arms hit in the tail section of an A-4 piloted by Captain James S. Harmon.

On 21 September the command suffered seven casualties when Chu Lai came under mortar attack. The enemy barrage of 25-30 rounds began at 0117 and lasted only five minutes. The initial rounds impacted short of the runway, but the subsequent rounds fell in a pattern progressing across the runway towards the group command post, and into the enlisted men's living area. All casualties sustained multiple wounds from shell fragments. Corporal Wayne E. Bostwick was seriously wounded and treated at the U. S. military hospital at Da Nang and subsequently evacuated to the United States. The other men wounded, Sergeant Richard E. Hicks, Corporals Willie P. Deloatch, and Dennie L. Peterson, Lance Corporals Michael C. Ransom, and Douglas H. Wood, and Private First Class Dietmar H. Fouche were treated at Chu Lai and returned to duty within five days.

Also during the month of September, Captain Charles A. Dixon flew the squadron's 15,000th accident-free hour. Additionally, Second Lieutenant David A. Marshall flew his 100th combat mission on the 16th to become one of the first Marine second lieutenants of the Vietnam War to accomplish this feat in fixed-wing tactical aircraft.

The monsoon season in October and November brought continuous torrential rains and high winds to Vietnam which severely curtailed flight

operations. The Bulldogs managed to fly 1,000 hours in October and they were able to destroy numerous enemy tunnels, structures, and personnel in November.

On 1 December the Bulldogs were able to leave the monsoon rains and combat operations. Under the command of Lieutenant Colonel Leonard C. Taft, VMA-223 exchanged places and aircraft with VMA-121 at Iwakuni, Japan, and once again came under the control of MAG-15.

While assigned to MAG-15, a detachment was sent to NAS, Cubi Point for participation in the close air support exercise MUD PUPPY II. At the same time the Bulldogs at Iwakuni provided support for Operation HAPPY FACE. During this annual operation at MCAS, Iwakuni, orphans from the area were brought on board the base for a day of fun, food, and gifts while many of the men worked the concessions or became volunteer fathers for the day.

Despite adverse weather, the squadron managed to deploy some A-4s to NAS, Naha, Okinawa for live ordnance training. The final deployment before returning to the war zone was to Cubi Point for participation in MUD PUPPY III. Then on 1 March 1967, VMA-223 was back at Chu Lai, Vietnam much refreshed after its brief tour in Japan.

It was not long before the enemy officially welcomed VMA-223 back into country. On 6 March Chu Lai was hit by approximately 60 rounds of 82mm mortar fire. The majority of the rounds fell in the company grade officers living area, but only minor injuries were suffered.

On 15 March the Bulldogs lost an aircraft. An A-4, piloted by Captain Stanley P. Krueger, was hit by ground fire and the pilot's only course of action was to head out to sea and eject. An Air Force SAR helicopter quickly arrived and returned the uninjured Captain Krueger to safety.

Combat missions continued during the spring of 1967 in support of III Marine Amphibious Force ground units and the Seventh Air Force. In May the tempo of operations increased and the squadron responded by flying 1276 sorties in 1645 flight hours establishing a new record for an A-4 squadron. Unfortunately, this accomplishment was not without its cost.

On 10 May, while Major Carmine W. Depietro and Captain Stephen W. Lind pounded the enemy in the Dong Ha area killing 25 NVA soldiers, Major Robert L. Snyder, a MAG-12 staff officer flying with the Bulldogs, was also in the Dong Ha area. As he



USMC Photo A421611

*A VMA-223 pilot launches from the hot pad at Chu Lai in March 1967. The A-4E is armed with four, 19-shot 2.75 rocket pods. The centerline pod is an auxiliary fuel tank.*

was about to roll in on target, his plane was hit by a surface-to-air missile (SAM); the plane was destroyed and Major Snyder was killed. Three days later, Captain George A. Kinser was rescued by a helicopter approximately three miles northwest of Dong Ha after ejecting from his A-4 which had been disabled by enemy ground fire. In all, two aircraft were destroyed and seven others damaged due to enemy action during May 1967.<sup>19</sup>

The June monthly total of 938 sorties and 1,149 flight hours reflected the decline in enemy activity which followed large scale assaults of the previous month. For Major Martin A. Yarnell and Captain Henry E. Lecy, the situation on 16 June did not seem any different than they had experienced in May. While standing the alert duty, a call came to launch in support of a Marine unit which was in heavy contact with Viet Cong forces 25 miles southwest of Da Nang. Two Marine positions 150 meters apart were under attack. The Marines in one position were fighting hand-to-hand with the VC while the second position was under heavy automatic weapons fire. Using white smoke, the tactical air controller, airborne, put the Skyhawk pilots directly on target—a tree line with fighting holes and trenches that protected the VC weapons. Carrying 250- and 500-pound bombs, the two jets rolled in on the enemy positions. The VC responded with automatic weapons fire in an attempt to stop the attacking planes. At almost tree-top level, the Bulldog pilots dropped their ordnance right on top of the enemy. By the time the A-4s had expended their ammunition, the Marines on the ground were able to repulse the remaining VC forces.

The squadron ended the month and fiscal year with an impressive total of 24,535 consecutive ac-

cident-free flight hours of which 14,736 hours were flown in a combat environment. On the basis of its continuing performance and impressive safety record, VMA-223 was selected by MAG-12 as the group's nominee for the Commandant's Aviation Efficiency Trophy for fiscal year 1967.

During the month of July, the squadron operated almost exclusively in support of III MAF ground units deployed in the I Corps area. Ground operations were light compared to May and parts of June, but the steady pace of air operations on all 31 days of the month saw the squadron amass a total of 1,423 flight hours and 1,106 sorties. This total placed VMA-223 as the high squadron in MAG-12 for the third consecutive month.

During August combat operations continued primarily in support of ground operations throughout the I Corps area, although 65 sorties were flown north of the DMZ against enemy artillery and anti-aircraft positions which were influencing 3d Marine Division operations. On 13 August 1967, Captain Wesley R. Phenegar, attached to Headquarters and Maintenance Squadron 12, was flying a VMA-223 aircraft when the jet developed engine trouble and crashed killing the pilot.

During the autumn months, VMA-223 continued providing support to ground units in RVN as well as striking enemy targets north of the DMZ. With the exception of a few .50 and .30 caliber hits, the A-4 pilots managed to evade fire. On 20 November the squadron received its third consecutive CNO Aviation Safety Award. The Bulldogs commanding officer, Lieutenant Colonel Arthur W. Anthony, Jr., attributed this accomplishment to the skill, dedication, and professionalism of the unit's maintenance personnel.

Upon completion of normal operations on 1 December 1967, VMA-223 was officially relieved at Chu Lai by VMA-211. The Bulldogs, having accumulated 15,414 combat sorties and 19,826 combat flight hours, left Vietnam for another tour at Iwakuni with MAG-15. This time their respite was to last more than four months.

From Japan the squadron sent two small detachments to NAS Cubi Point and one to Okinawa. The first deployment to the Philippines, from 10-15 December, consisted of 5 pilots, 16 enlisted men, and 4 planes which provided air support for the 9th Marine Amphibious Brigade's Special Landing Force on Operation BLT LEX 1-68. The exercise also included the training of tactical air control parties in

utilizing "in-country" procedures for effective control of Marine air. Again, from 9-24 January 1968, the Bulldogs had a detachment at Cubi Point. This deployment was for the express purpose of training newly joined pilots in conventional ordnance delivery.

In addition to the training received during these deployments, the pilots practiced aerial refueling, tactics, and instrument flying. After a deployment to Naha Air Base, Okinawa, from 3-16 March, the Bulldogs prepared for the return to Vietnam. On 17 April, the advance party, consisting of 7 officers and 42 enlisted men, departed MCAS, Iwakuni and arrived the following day at Chu Lai. The squadron aircraft were flown to Vietnam on the 22d while the remainder of the squadron personnel boarded VMGR-152's KC-130s. On the morning of 23 April, VMA-223 with 29 aviators, 4 ground officers, and 224 enlisted men was again in Vietnam.

Flight operations, consisting primarily of close air support missions, were conducted as the Bulldogs provided assistance for operations of the 82d and 101st Airborne Divisions, 1st Air Cavalry Division, 1st Korean Marine Brigade, as well as Marines in I Corps. In total, the squadron supported 12 ground operations and flew direct air support missions into North Vietnam hitting artillery sites that were threatening elements of the 3d Marine Division.

On 1 May 1968, Lieutenant Colonel Erin D. Smith relieved Lieutenant Colonel Anthony as commanding officer. Unfortunately, Lieutenant Colonel Smith's tour did not begin the way a new skipper would like. On 6 May, Captain Manuel A. Guzman was involved in a mid-air collision with an A-4E during a close air support mission in the A Shau Valley. Captain Guzman, leading a two-plane section, was passing through 10,000 feet over the target when his jet collided with another A-4 which was departing the target area. Captain Guzman lost control of his jet and had to eject immediately, while the pilot of the other Skyhawk was able to reach the coast before having to eject. Both pilots were rescued by helicopter. Then on 24 May, Captain Steven J. Driscoll was shot down by .50 caliber fire while attacking an enemy gun position 30 miles northwest of Chu Lai. Once again the pilot successfully ejected and was rescued by helicopter.

Not all the losses that befell the squadron in May occurred in the skies over Vietnam. On 13 May, after a night combat mission, Corporal Arthur L. Waldorf was critically burned in a flash fire which



USMC Photo A26453

*A Skyhawk in flight over South Vietnam. VMA-223 flew the A-4E for six years from 1964-1970.*

occurred during refueling operations on the flight line. Corporal Albert J. Faung, seeing Corporal Waldorf engulfed in flames, rushed to him, tore off his burning clothing, and helped him to a nearby water barrel. Corporal Waldorf was evacuated to Japan, but died from his injuries on 22 May. Corporal Faung was awarded the Navy and Marine Corps Medal for his heroic attempt to save Waldorf from the flames.

The series of mishaps that plagued the unit during May continued on into June. On 6 June a Skyhawk was taxiing into the line when the left brake failed. The plane veered to the right and ran off the taxiway hitting a passenger boarding ramp with the right wing tip. The nose and main gear then sank into soft sand and the aircraft overturned. The pilot, Captain Charles B. Coltrin, was uninjured, but the jet was seriously damaged. On 25 June, Captain Coltrin was again in the cockpit attacking an automatic weapons position near Khe Sanh when his Skyhawk was hit by .50 caliber fire. Captain Coltrin ejected safely and was recovered by helicopter.

On 24 June Major Ralph K. Park's aircraft settled back onto the runway after takeoff rupturing the centerline fuel tank. The aircraft slid down the runway leaving a trail of flames behind it; approaching the end of the runway Major Park ejected. Major Park suffered a fractured ankle and first and second degree burns and the Skyhawk received major damage and was transferred to the rework facility in Japan.

In an effort to reduce Communist influence around its base, VMA-223 launched an aggressive civic action program. In June 1968, the men of the squadron donated \$480 to establish a scholarship fund for children of the Dong Cong School at Chu Lai. The Bulldogs also devoted many off-duty hours to the construction and repair of school facilities.

The rash of aircraft mishaps seemed to come to an end in June, and for the next three months the squadron operated with the same degree of success they had enjoyed prior to May. During this period of July through October 1968, VMA-223 averaged over 1,000 hours a month of accident-free flight time. A few Skyhawks received hits from small arms fire, but none were seriously damaged nor were any of the pilots injured. The Bulldog's missions kept them primarily over RVN, but in July they flew 120 missions against targets in North Vietnam.

Although unit strength remained relatively constant, the squadron lost six combat-experienced pilots in August through normal rotation or assignment to forward air controller (FAC) billets. Replacements were equal in number, but five of the six new pilots lacked combat experience. In response to the buildup of enemy forces in the Chu Lai area and the increasing threat of ground attack, the VMA-223 Ground Defense Company, led by Captain Jon M. Zayachek, conducted tactical briefings, test fired and zeroed its weapons and fortified its defensive positions. The defense company

was alerted during two nights in August, but there were no fire incidents or contact with the enemy.

In October, monsoon rains caused many missions to be cancelled, however, the Bulldogs still managed to fly 890 hours. While the majority of the flight time was in support of small unit operations, the squadron did take part in the following large-scale operations.<sup>20</sup>

<i>Operation</i>	<i>Unit</i>
MAUI PEAK . . . . .	7th Marines/51st ARVN Regiment
SCOTLAND II . . . . .	4th Marines/2d ARVN Regiment
LANCASTER II . . . . .	26th Marines
NEVADA EAGLE . . . . .	U.S. Army's Americal Division

All hopes of salvaging the squadron's safety record was lost on 1 October 1968. A single-plane ground-controlled bombing mission flown by First Lieutenant David I. Habermacher, Jr., came to an abrupt end when the A-4 crashed on takeoff. Due to a blown tire the plane lifted off on the extreme left side of the runway. The right main gear struck an arresting gear engine and the left gear struck a revetment. As the aircraft began to settle, Lieutenant Habermacher safely ejected. The Skyhawk hit the ground and burst into flames completely destroying the jet.

On 15 October 1968, Lieutenant Colonel Smith ended his tour as commanding officer and Major Leonard T. Preston, Jr., became the number one Bulldog. Unfortunately, his tour did not begin very well either. On 21 October, Captain David A. Wellman landed at Chu Lai just after dark. With his attention focused primarily on watching the runway ahead of him, Captain Wellman did not notice that he was on the right edge of the runway until just before the right wing of his jet struck the arresting gear revetment. As the aircraft continued up the runway, the wing separated from the fuselage. The pilot suffered an injured shoulder, and the A-4 was destroyed.

During November, VMA-223 flew 1,110 hours and 1,035 sorties of which 1,070 hours and 997 sorties were flown in support of combat operations. The Bulldogs flew 75 more sorties than any other squadron in MAG-12 during the month. The squadron also exceeded, by 275 sorties and 202 hours, the previous November high for a MAG-12 Vietnam-based squadron. More than 1,433 tons of aviation ordnance were expended, and air operations were conducted all 30 days of the month.

In December it was business as usual for the members of VMA-223. The mission flown by the pilots cost the enemy 185 bunkers, 243 struc-

tures, and 5 gun sites. The 1,723 tons of explosives dropped also accounted for 43 secondary fires and 28 secondary explosions. The following month was nearly identical for the Bulldogs with approximately the same results.

Later in January, a squadron A-4, piloted by Captain Michael P. Green, was shot down while flying close air support for units of the 1st Marine Division near Thuong Duc. Captain Green received several hits from enemy small arms fire, but he managed to get the crippled Skyhawk out over the ocean before he ejected. A U. S. Navy boat picked him up and returned him, uninjured, to Chu Lai.

February 1969 was another record month for the men of VMA-223. The squadron flew 965 sorties, 177 more than any other MAG-12 unit, and set a new record for the month of February. The previous record for that month was set in 1968 by VMA-121 when it flew 908 sorties. Also during the month, the squadron reached 30,000 hours flown in support of combat operations since it first arrived in Vietnam.

March was another successful month for the unit as it continued pounding the enemy with the same results it had had in the previous few months. The squadron personnel took a few minutes out of their schedule on 10 March when the MAG-12 commander, Colonel Thomas H. Nichols, Jr., visited the unit to congratulate First Lieutenant Dennis R. Grose on completing VMA-223's 25,000th combat sortie.

On 21 March 1969, the squadron provided assistance for Marine units under attack, but this time the help came from the men on the ground rather than the pilots in their Skyhawks. During the early morning hours, the VC rocketed the Chu Lai complex. Several rockets impacted in the line area of VMA-211 and VMA-311. In a valiant attempt to save the aircraft of these squadrons from further damage, a number of men from VMA-223 assisted the neighboring squadrons in pushing aircraft to more secure areas. During this period, five Bulldogs: Master Sergeant John D. Simmerman, Staff Sergeant Stanley I. Spawn, and Lance Corporals Edwin D. Montgomery, Kenneth R. Moore, and Robert D. Shepard, distinguished themselves and were awarded the Bronze Star for their courage and dedication. Throughout the months of March-September the Bulldogs continued flying without an accident and conducted air operations every day for seven consecutive months.

On 10 April Major Preston relinquished command

of the squadron to Lieutenant Colonel Merrill S. Newbill. During Newbill's tour as commanding officer VMA-223 again lead the other squadrons in MAG-12 in sorties and flight time.

Lieutenant Colonel Newbill completed his tour as commanding officer 27 September and was replaced by Lieutenant Colonel James W. Lazzo. The squadron closed out a fairly quiet September with 588 flight hours logged, but the Bulldogs now had accumulated a very respectable total of 11,400 accident-free hours.

Between 1 October and 31 December 1969, bad weather and the enemy's avoidance of large-scale engagements decreased the number of Bulldog commitments to the point that the unit averaged only 515 hours and 420 sorties per month. During this three-month period, VMA-223 supported three major operations in I Corps:

GENEVA PARK .....	84 sorties
IRON MOUNTAIN .....	111 sorties
VICTORY DRAGON .....	187 sorties

President Richard M. Nixon, on 16 December 1969, announced his intention to withdraw 50,000 men from Vietnam. This was the third such reduction in U. S. strength,\* and MAG-12 began preparations to leave Vietnam.<sup>21</sup>

On 14 January 1970, VMA-223 launched 10 sorties as Lieutenant Colonel Lazzo led his Bulldogs on their final day of combat operations. The men then set about the task of packing equipment and preparing the jets for the long trans-Pacific flight home. On 28 January, having expended more than 34,260 tons of ordnance and flying 32,068 sorties in 38,375 hours during the Vietnam deployment VMA-223 was on its way home.

Accompanied by F-4 Phantoms from VMFA-542, 20 VMA-223 Skyhawks in four five-plane divisions led by Lieutenant Colonel Lazzo, departed from Chu Lai on Operation KEY WALLOP, the largest trans-Pacific flight to date. The grueling flight, which spanned more than 8,000 miles, required more than 20 hours of flight time per aircraft. Rest and maintenance stops were made in the Philippines, Guam, Wake Island, and Hawaii and inflight refueling was accomplished along the way with Marine KC-130s. On 8 February 1970, after nearly 5

1/2 years in the Far East, VMA-223 arrived at El Toro, and for this squadron at least, Vietnam had become history.

### *The Return to Garrison*

Marine Attack Squadron 223 was assigned to MAG-33, 3d MAW, El Toro and placed in a cadre status upon its return to the United States. During March the squadron had only 6 officers and 22 enlisted men, and their 20 A-4s had been transferred to VMA-214, the Black Sheep squadron.

On 31 July, while still in a cadre status, the squadron received its first replacement aircraft, an A-4F. The A-4F was 2.3 feet longer and had a 1,150 pound increase in takeoff weight over the A-4E. This newest A-4 also had a larger wheel base, an increased fuel capacity to 870 gallons, more advanced avionics, wing-lift spoilers for improved crosswind performance, and nose wheel steering.<sup>22</sup> Twelve additional A-4Fs were acquired from August to December 1970. On 1 September VMA-223 joined MAG-13 at El Toro.

During the first six months of 1971, VMA-223 faced the usual problems associated with building and training a reconstituted squadron. One of the most serious of these problems was the lack of experienced personnel. Most of the aviators assigned to the squadron were fresh out of flight training. The few available staff noncommissioned officers worked long hours training the enlisted men and providing the pilots with ready aircraft. In spite of these difficulties, the squadron was able to increase its total flight hours from 891 for the last half of 1970 to 2,543 for the first six months of 1971.

On 28 February, the squadron made its first movement since returning from Vietnam. With eight aircraft, VMA-223 deployed to MCAS Yuma, Arizona, for two weeks of training. During this training cycle, new pilots were introduced to conventional weapons delivery while the more experienced pilots had the opportunity to regain their proficiency.

On 25 May, after 21 months of command, Lieutenant Colonel Lazzo was relieved by Major Alfonso Oseguera. The squadron then began preparations for its second deployment. On 1 June, 18 pilots, 108 enlisted men, and eight Skyhawks departed for NAS Fallon, Nevada, for three weeks.

After an annual administrative and material inspection in July 1971, the unit deployed to MCAS Yuma. Training was conducted in nuclear weapons

\*The first reduction in U. S. strength, 25,000 men, was announced on 8 June 1969 followed three months later, on 17 September, by the announcement of another reduction of 40,500 men.





USMC Photo A331747

*A-4Es of Marine Attack Squadron 223 parked on a ramp at NAS Cubi Point while en route back to the United States.*

delivery and advanced tactical conventional weapons procedures. On 3 January 1972, the Bulldogs returned to El Toro.

During the early months of 1972, VMA-223 conducted routine flight operations centered around nuclear and conventional weapons delivery, SATS operations, and instrument refresher training. Preparations for a permanent move to MCAS Yuma were initiated during March and on 1 June the move began. By the third week in June, the squadron's relocation was completed.

Though severely handicapped by personnel shortages, the squadron continued to prepare pilots for combat should the need arise. The transition to a peacetime environment had been completed successfully. During the period of July through December 1972, the unit flew more hours than any other 3d MAW tactical squadron. The Bulldogs continued training and in May 1973, with only 72 hours notice, VMA-223 deployed to NAS Fallon with 16 jets for a training readiness exercise. The

following month the squadron was again put to the test; this time it was a nuclear weapons acceptance inspection. On both occasions the squadron demonstrated a high degree of professionalism and successfully completed the requirements that were placed upon it.

In October the Bulldogs added another dimension to their aerial abilities. The high thrust of the A-4 was similar to many of the aircraft possessed by Communist countries, and it soon became an invaluable asset in training fighter aircrews in combating aircraft of this type. Consequently, the VMA-223 pilots acquired the role as aggressors for air combat maneuvering (ACM) training. A detachment was sent first in October to Nellis AFB where the squadron pilots proved to be extremely skilled competitors when opposing fighters from the USAF Fighter Weapons School.

Later in the month, the pilots went to NAS Miramar where they opposed Navy fighters from VF-1 and -2. The Bulldogs' ACM reputation was





USMC Photo A707810

*A VMA-223 Skyhawk in flight. The Bulldogs are stationed at MCAS Yuma.*

further enhanced during February 1974 when the unit was selected to evaluate an air combat maneuvering range for the Marine Corps. From 11 through 22 February, the squadron flew ACM missions involving dissimilar types of aircraft. The efforts of the ground personnel and the aggressiveness of the aviators contributed significantly to the successful evaluation of the ACM range.

Throughout the remainder of 1974 and 1975, the officers and men of the Yuma-based VMA-223 continued flight operations and intensive training. From 20-23 January 1976 the Bulldogs had a live firing air-to-air gunnery exercise, and at the end of April the squadron participated in a live Sidewinder missile shoot. The experience gained from these exercises became evident when VMA-223 topped all squadrons in the 3d MAW bombing competition held during May 1976. The Bulldogs won first place in both team and individual pilot competition.

From on 23-31 July 1976, a transpac flight of all 17 aircraft was conducted from MCAS Yuma to MCAS

Iwakuni, Japan. The termination of the transpac operation resulted in the change of administrative and operational control from the 3d MAW to the 1st MAW and assignment to MAG-12.

While deployed overseas VMA-223 worked as adversary aircraft against the Navy's F-14 Tomcats at NAS Cubi Point, P.I., and flew in support of Operation MULTIPLEX, a Japanese Air Self-Defense Force exercise. The squadron also participated in Exercise COPE THUNDER III at Clark AFB, P.I., and from 14 October to 3 November supported MAG-10 in the major amphibious operation KANGAROO II/BEACH LINK in Australia. Capping off the year the squadron flew on board the USS *Enterprise* (CVN 65) for carrier qualification.

VMA-223 constantly maintains its alertness and readiness and has proven its worth from Guadalcanal to Vietnam. It stands ready to answer the call of its country anytime, anywhere.



# NOTES

---

## *From Birth to Guadalcanal*

Unless otherwise noted, the material in this section is derived from Robert Sherrod, *History of Marine Corps Aviation in World War II*, (Washington: Combat Forces Press, 1952), hereafter, Sherrod, *Aviation*; and Marine Fighting Squadron 223 War Diaries, August 1942 - June 1943 hereafter, VMF-223 War Diary and date.

1. *Jane's All the World's Aircraft 1942*, compiled and edited by Leonard Bridgman, (New York: MacMillan Co., 1943) p. 156c., hereafter, *Jane's Aircraft* and date.

2. *Ibid.* p. 185c.

3. Sherrod, *Aviation*, p. 79.

4. *The Tampa Tribune*, 1 October 1942, p. 12.

5. *Flight Jacket*, (MCAS El Toro, California) 3 August 1962, p. 5, hereafter, *Flight Jacket* and date.

6. USMC World War II Casualty Report, Case History Cards, (HistRefSec, Hist&MusDiv, HQMC).

## *From the Solomons to Okinawa*

Unless otherwise noted, the material in this section is derived from Sherrod, *Aviation*; VMF-223 War Diaries, July 1943 - August 1945; and VMA-223 Squadron History File (HistRefSec, Hist&MusDiv, HQMC), hereafter VMA-223 HistFile.

7. *Jane's Aircraft*, 1943 - 1944, p. 234c.

8. USMC Casualty Report, *op. cit.*

9. VMF-223 War Diary, January 1945.

10. *Ibid.*, June 1945.

## *A Force in Readiness: 1946 to 1950*

Material in this section is derived from VMF-223 Muster Rolls, February 1946 - 15 December 1949; *Flight Jacket*, February 1946 - June 1948; *Windsock*, (MCAS Cherry Point, North Carolina), July 1948 - January 1950. All material is located in HistRefSec, Hist&MusDiv, HQMC.

## *Entering the Jet Age*

Unless otherwise noted, the material in this section is derived from VMA-223 Unit Diaries, 1950-1960; *Flight Jacket*, May 1950 - April 1965.

11. *Jane's Aircraft*, 1949 - 1950, p. 228c.

12. *Flight Jacket*, 6 November 1956, p. 1.

13. *Jane's Aircraft*, 1957-1958, pp. 343-344.

14. *Flight Jacket*, 20 September 1960, p. 2.

15. *Jane's Aircraft*, 1957-1958, pp. 285-286.

## *Vietnam*

Unless otherwise noted, the material in this section is derived from 1st MAW Command Chronologies, Informational Services Office Appendix, June 1965 - December 1969; MAG-12 Command Chronologies, June 1965 - June 1969; VMA-223 Command Chronologies, June 1965 - February 1970. All chronologies are located in HistRefSec, Hist&MusDiv, HQMC.

16. Fleet Marine Force, Pacific, *Operation of the Marine Forces in Vietnam*, December 1965, (HistRefSec, Hist&MusDiv, HQMC) p. 8. hereafter, *Marines in Vietnam*.

17. 1st MAW SitRep msg 03223Z, dtd 3 Jun 66, cited in 1st MAW Command Chronology, Daily SitRep Appendix, June 1966.

18. *Marines in Vietnam*, August 1966, p. 3.

19. *Marines in Vietnam*, May 1967, p. 11.

20. *Marines in Vietnam*, October 1968, p. 27.

21. LtGen Keith B. McCutcheon, "Marine Aviation in Vietnam 1962-1970," *Naval Review 1971* (Annapolis: U.S. Naval Institute, 1971) p. 153.

## *The Return to Garrison*

Material in this section is derived from VMA-223 Command Chronologies, January 1970 - June 1974.

22. McDonnell Douglas "News" Market Intelligence Report, Oct 66, p. 2.



# APPENDIX A

## CHRONOLOGY

---

1 May 1942	Activated as Marine Fighting Squadron 223, MAG-23, 2d MAW, FMF at NAS Barbers Point, Territory of Hawaii.	29 Jan 1950	Returned to MCAS, Cherry Point.
2 Aug 1942	Departed Pearl Harbor.	4 Sep 1950	Redesignated VMF-223, MAG-14, 2d MAW, Air FMFLant.
22 Aug 1942	Arrived at Guadalcanal and assigned to 1st MAW.	21 Jul 1953	Reassigned to MAG-11.
18 Dec 1942	Redesignated VMF-223, MAG-23, Service Group, Marine Aircraft Wing Pacific, FMF.	7 Aug 1953	Departed Morehead City, North Carolina on board the USS <i>Deuel</i> for Far East deployment.
13 Oct 1942	Departed Guadalcanal.	11 Sep 1953	Arrived at Yokosuka, Japan and assigned to MAG-11, 1st MAW, Air FMFPac at NAS Atsugi.
17 Oct 1942	Arrived at San Diego, California and redesignated VMF-223, MAG-23, 1st MAW, FMF.	30 Sep 1954	Relocated to MCAS El Toro and assigned to MAG-15, Air FMFPac.
19 Jul 1943	Departed San Diego.	1 Dec 1954	Redesignated Marine Attack Squadron 223.
27 Jul 1943	Arrived at Pearl Harbor and assigned to MAG-22, 4th Marine Base Defense Air Wing.	12 Sep 1955	Redesignated VMA-223, MAG-15, 2d MAW, Air FMFPac.
1 Aug 1943	Arrived Naval Operating Base, Midway Island.	23 Apr 1956	Embarked on board the USS <i>Wasp</i> and sailed from San Diego for a deployment to the Far East.
18 Aug 1943	Redesignated VMF-223, MAG-22, FMF.	4 Nov 1956	Returned to MAG-15, MCAS El Toro.
13 Nov 1943	Arrived at Efate, New Hebrides and assigned to MAG-12, 2d MAW.	30 Mar 1963	Departed El Toro for Far East tour.
19 Jan 1944	Departed Efate.	2 Apr 1963	Arrived at MCAS Iwakuni, Japan and assigned to MAG-12, 1st MAW, FMFPac.
25 Jan 1944	Arrived at Bougainville, British Solomon Islands and assigned to MAG-24, 1st MAW.	2 Apr 1964	Returned to MCAS El Toro and assigned to MAG-15, 3d MAW, Air FMFPac.
14 Mar 1944	Departed Bougainville.	1 Sep 1965	Departed San Diego on board the USS <i>Valley Forge</i> for Far East deployment.
16 Mar 1944	Arrived at Green Island, British Solomon Islands and assigned to MAG-14, 1st MAW.	15 Sep 1965	Arrived at Iwakuni, Japan and assigned to MAG-13, 1st MAW, FMFPac.
24 Jun 1944	Reassigned to MAG-24, 1st MAW.	16 Dec 1965	Deployed to Chu Lai, RVN and assigned to MAG-12, 1st MAW, FMFPac.
12 Jan 1945	Arrived at Samar, Philippine Islands.	4 Dec 1966	Departed RVN for Iwakuni, Japan and assigned to MAG-15(Rein), 9th MAB, FMFPac.
23 May 1945	Reassigned to MAG-14, 2d MAW.	1 Mar 1967	Returned to Chu Lai, RVN and rejoined MAG-12(Rein).
22 Jun 1945	Arrived at Okinawa Shima and assigned to MAG-24, 1st MAW.	3 Dec 1967	Deployed to Iwakuni, Japan and rejoined MAG-15(Rein).
11 Feb 1946	Departed Okinawa.	23 Apr 1968	Returned to Chu Lai, RVN and rejoined MAG-12.
28 Feb 1946	Arrived at Marine Corps Air Depot Miramar, San Diego, California and assigned to MAG-33, Marine Air West Coast.	28 Jan 1970	Departed Chu Lai, RVN on trans-Pac flight to California.
15 Mar 1946	Relocated to MCAS El Toro, California.	8 Feb 1970	Arrived MCAS El Toro and assigned to MAG-33, 3d MAW, FMFPac.
1 Oct 1947	Redesignated VMF-223, MAG-33, 1st MAW, FMF.	1 Jun 1972	Relocated to MCAS Yuma, Arizona and assigned to Marine Combat Crew Readiness Training Group 10, 3d MAW.
8 Jun 1948	Relocated to MCAS Cherry Point, North Carolina and assigned to MAG-14, 2d MAW.	23 Jul 1976	Deployed to Iwakuni, Japan and assigned to MAG-12, 1st MAW.
1 Aug 1948	Squadron designation changed from Marine Fighting Squadron 223, MAG-14 to Marine Fighter Squadron 223, MAG-11.		
5 Sep 1949	Embarked on board the USS <i>Leyte</i> and sailed from Quonset, Rhode Island to Gibraltar and France.		
Oct 1949 - Jan 1950	Port calls at Malta, Greece, Cyprus, Italy, Sicily, and North Africa.		



# APPENDIX B

## COMMANDING OFFICERS

---

Capt John L. Smith .....	1 May 1942 - 31 Dec 1942
1stLt Conrad G. Winter .....	1 Jan 1943 - 13 Jan 1943
Capt Howard K. Marvin .....	14 Jan 1943 - 25 Jan 1943
Maj Marion E. Carl .....	26 Jan 1943 - 3 Feb 1944
Maj Robert P. Keller .....	4 Feb 1944 - 2 Jul 1944
Maj David Drucker .....	3 Jul 1944 - 13 Oct 1944
Maj Robert F. Flaherty .....	14 Oct 1944 - 30 Mar 1945
Maj Robert W. Teller .....	31 Mar 1945 - 16 Apr 1945
Maj Howard E. King .....	17 Apr 1945 - 23 Jul 1945
Maj Julius W. Ireland .....	24 Jul 1945 - 27 Feb 1946
Maj James M. Johnson .....	28 Feb 1946 - 21 May 1947
Maj Arthur F. O'Keefe .....	22 May 1947 - 8 Jun 1947
Maj Michael R. Yunck .....	10 Jun 1947 - 6 Mar 1948
Maj George F. Bastian .....	7 Mar 1948 - 5 May 1948
LtCol Nathan T. Post, Jr. ....	6 May 1948 - 14 Jul 1948
Maj Richard W. Wyczawski .....	15 Jul 1948 - 24 Mar 1949
Maj George F. Vaughan .....	25 Mar 1949 - 1 May 1949
Maj Darrell D. Irwin .....	2 May 1949 - 15 May 1950
Maj Thomas G. Bronleewe, Jr. ....	16 May 1950 - 19 Mar 1951
Maj Robert R. Baker .....	20 Mar 1951 - 9 Apr 1951
LtCol Frank E. Hollar .....	10 Apr 1951 - 15 Jul 1951
LtCol Hoyle R. Barr .....	16 Jul 1951 - 8 Jul 1953
LtCol Honore G. Dalton .....	9 Jul 1953 - 20 Jan 1954
LtCol Arvid W. Blackmun .....	29 Jan 1954 - 14 Jun 1954
Maj James M. Burris .....	15 Jun 1954 - 31 Aug 1954
LtCol John McGuckin .....	1 Sep 1954 - 4 Nov 1954
Maj Robert B. Laing .....	5 Nov 1954 - 20 Sep 1955
Maj Victor E. Allen .....	21 Sep 1955 - 4 Dec 1956
LtCol Willard C. Lemke .....	5 Dec 1956 - 22 May 1958
Maj Ernest A. Buford, Jr. ....	23 May 1958 - 21 Oct 1958
LtCol Dave E. Severance .....	22 Oct 1958 - 9 Nov 1959
Maj Boris J. Frankovic .....	10 Nov 1959 - 1 Aug 1960
Maj Marvin R. Stout .....	2 Aug 1960 - 12 Nov 1961
LtCol Norman L. Hamm .....	13 Nov 1961 - 30 Mar 1964
LtCol Lawrence H. Brandon .....	31 Mar 1964 - 30 Sep 1964
LtCol Tolbert T. Gentry .....	1 Oct 1964 - 15 Apr 1965
Maj Harold C. Colvin .....	16 Apr 1965 - 15 Jul 1965
LtCol Roy C. Gray, Jr. ....	16 Jul 1965 - 27 Sep 1965
LtCol Alexander Wilson .....	28 Sep 1965 - 2 Apr 1966
LtCol Robert B. Sinclair .....	3 Apr 1966 - 26 Nov 1966
LtCol Leonard C. Taft .....	27 Nov 1966 - 25 Mar 1967
LtCol Claude E. Deering .....	26 Mar 1967 - 26 Sep 1967
LtCol Arthur W. Anthony .....	27 Sep 1967 - 30 Apr 1968
LtCol Erin D. Smith .....	1 May 1968 - 15 Oct 1968
Maj Leonard T. Preston, Jr. ....	16 Oct 1968 - 10 Apr 1969
LtCol Merrill S. Newbill .....	11 Apr 1969 - 27 Sep 1969
LtCol James W. Lazzo .....	28 Sep 1969 - 25 May 1971
Maj Alfonso Oseguera .....	26 May 1971 - 31 May 1972
LtCol Donald W. Dane .....	1 Jun 1972 - 7 Jun 1973

Maj Martin J. Lenzini .....	8 Jun 1973 - 20 Jun 1974
Maj Ronald E. Merrihew .....	21 Jun 1974 - 27 Jun 1975
LtCol John A. Rooke .....	28 Jun 1975 - 23 Apr 1976
LtCol Gordon O. Booth .....	24 Apr 1976 - 12 Aug 1977
Major Phillip R. Hemming .....	13 Aug 1977 - 22 Aug 1977
LtCol Robert H. Melville .....	23 Aug 1977 - 31 July 1978
Major Phillip R. Hemming .....	1 Aug 1978 - 10 Sep 1978
LtCol Samuel D. Turner, Jr. ....	11 Sept 1978 -



# APPENDIX C

## STREAMER ENTITLEMENT

---

### PRESIDENT UNIT CITATION STREAMER WITH TWO BRONZE STARS

Guadalcanal, 22 Aug - 13 Oct 1942

Okinawa, 25 Jun - 14 Jul 1945

Vietnam, 16 Dec 1965 - 1 Dec 1966 and 1 Mar - 15 Sep 1967

### NAVY UNIT COMMENDATION STREAMER WITH TWO BRONZE STARS

Vietnam, 16 Dec 1965 - 15 Apr 1966

Vietnam, 15 Sep - 1 Dec 1967

Vietnam, 24 Apr - 31 Mar 1969

### ASIATIC-PACIFIC CAMPAIGN STREAMER WITH ONE SILVER STAR

Capture and defense of Guadalcanal, 21 Aug - 13 Oct 1942

Treasury- Bougainville operation, 13 Nov - 15 Dec 1948

Consolidation of the northern Solomons, 17 Feb 1944 - 11 Jan 1945

Consolidation of the southern Philippines, 10 Mar - 11 Jun 1945

Okinawa Gunto operation, 25 Jun - 14 Jul 1945

### WORLD WAR II VICTORY STREAMER

1 May 1942 - 31 Dec 1946

### NAVY OCCUPATION SERVICE STREAMER WITH ASIA AND EUROPE CLASP

Okinawa, 2 Sep 1945 - 11 Feb 1946

Europe, 6 Sep 1949 - 17 Jan 1950

### NATIONAL DEFENSE SERVICE STREAMER WITH ONE BRONZE STAR

27 Jun 1950 - 27 Jul 1954

1 Jan 1961 - 15 Aug 1974

### KOREAN SERVICE STREAMER

Japan, 11 Sep 1953 - 27 Jul 1954

### VIETNAM SERVICE STREAMER WITH TWO SILVER STARS

Vietnam Defense Campaign, 16 Dec - 24 Dec 1965

Vietnamese Counteroffensive Campaign, 25 Dec 1965 - 30 Jun 1966

Vietnamese Counteroffensive Phase II, 1 Jul - 4 Dec 1966 and 1 Mar - 31 May 1967

Vietnamese Counteroffensive Phase III, 1 Jun - 2 Dec 1967

Vietnamese Counteroffensive Phase IV, 23 Apr - 30 Jun 1968

Vietnamese Counteroffensive Phase V, 1 Jul - 1 Nov 1968

Vietnam Counteroffensive Phase VI, 2 Nov 1968 - 22 Feb 1969

Tet 69/Counteroffensive, 23 Feb - 8 Jun 1969

Vietnam, Summer-Fall 1969, 9 Jun - 31 Oct 1969

Vietnam, Winter-Spring 1970, 1 Nov 1969 - 7 Feb 1970

### PHILIPPINE LIBERATION STREAMER WITH ONE BRONZE STAR

10 Mar - 11 Jun 1945

### PHILIPPINE PRESIDENTIAL CITATION STREAMER

12 Jan - 15 May 1945

### VIETNAM CROSS OF GALLANTRY WITH PALM

16 Dec 1965 - 4 Dec 1966, 1 Mar 1967 - 20 Sep 1969

### VIETNAM MERITORIOUS UNIT CITATION CIVIL ACTIONS STREAMER

21 Sep 1969 - 7 Feb 1970



*On the back cover:*

*The squadron insignia for VMF-223 shows the "Fighting Bulldog."*

